



Central Iron County Water Conservancy District
88 E Fiddlers Canyon Road
Ste. 220
Cedar City, UT 84721



PRESS RELEASE

December 10, 2021

Community shows up to learn about water

More than 400 people gathered Dec. 7 to learn more about the Cedar Valley's water challenges and potential solutions, filling the seats in SUU's Gilbert Great Hall and standing along the back and sides of the large room.

The meeting was put on by the Central Iron County Water Conservancy District, with panelists representing different interests and areas of expertise in the community. District General Manager Paul Monroe said he was happy to see such a great turnout, and it was an indicator that residents want to learn more about water challenges and solutions in the valley.

"It's exciting to see our community engaged in learning about this crucial resource," he said.

A video was shown highlighting the challenges and the District's recent projects to optimize the valley's water. Monroe also spoke, giving the audience background information on the proposed Pine Valley Water Supply project. A panel then answered questions that had been submitted before the meeting.

Panelists included Monroe, Enoch City Manager Rob Dotson, Cedar City Council Member Terri Hartley, Utah Division of Water Rights Regional Engineer Nathan Moses, and Southern Utah University Economist David Tufte. Questions touched on topics ranging from why growth is allowed in the area to how much the proposed PVWS project would cost.

Most of the questions submitted revolved around population and growth. Dotson was asked why cities continue to approve building permits. He said the Constitutions of the country and the state protect personal property rights, and the state actually doesn't allow a moratorium on building. Cities can set parameters, such as the ordinances that require developers to bring water to the city to get subdivisions approved, however, it is unconstitutional for cities to disallow people to build on their property or subdivide their property.

"We cannot stop growth, but we can wisely get the resources available so that people can use their property to the highest use at the highest value," Dotson said.

Tufte said even if a moratorium on building was legal, it would not solve the problem of an already overdrawn aquifer. New growth can be part of the solution, if impact fees are used to help fund the Pine Valley Water Supply project, he said.

“We do need to do something to get more water into the community, and I think the Pine Valley project is the best way to do that,” Tufte said.

Hartley was asked about wasted water, and she said that there is room for improvement, but Iron County should be proud of its conservation efforts.

“Iron County is actually already doing a pretty good job of that,” she said. “We are the fourth-lowest water user of the 29 counties in Utah, and we compare very favorably to our neighboring counties.”

Hartley said it is good to have some green public spaces, and that plants have a cooling effect and absorb more flood water. While she recognized room for improvement among government entities, businesses and residents, she said many productive conservation efforts have been implemented in recent years. She answered a question about a turf buy-back program, and said the state’s research showed that areas with such a program are paying \$3 per square foot of lawn removed. This puts the cost at more than three times the cost of the Pine Valley Project per acre-foot.

Moses explained the state’s Groundwater Management Plan, detailing the challenges of having an overdrawn aquifer. He said the average annual recharge amount is 21,000 acre-feet, but water users in the valley pump about 28,000 acre-feet of groundwater. Water rights allow for around 50,000 acre-feet to be pumped each year. The plan is to curtail water rights, beginning with the first cut in 2035, and targeting the newest rights first.

While the state’s plan at this point is to gradually curtail all water rights back to those with a priority date of 1934 or earlier, Moses said the Groundwater Management Plan allows for any recharged water to count against the cuts, and it also allows for other voluntary arrangements. Ideas can be presented to the state engineer, and if at any time they see the groundwater stabilizing sooner than the expected date, they are not obligated to curtail the remaining expected rights. The plan is gradual to allow for people to plan for it and adapt slowly.

“The hope that everyone has is that we don’t have to have anybody suffer from this, but we do need to be prepared for it because it is on the books, it is law, and it can be executed,” Moses said, adding that water is a finite resource that needs protection.

Monroe added that the plan will ultimately make about 75 percent of the municipalities’ water portfolios unusable.

The District has been working for years to acquire water in the West Desert, Monroe said, and he showed a map explaining that the Pine Valley in which the District owns water rights is about 70 miles northwest of Cedar City, and is not the same Pine Valley that is in Washington County. The District owns 15,000 acre-feet of water rights in that area.

District staff have been doing everything they can to make the Pine Valley Water Supply Project a viable option for the Cedar Valley, Monroe said. The project is currently in the planning phase. Specifically, it is in the Environmental Impact Statement process with the Bureau of Land Management. Before a system could actually be installed and water be imported to the Cedar Valley, elected officials in Cedar City, Enoch, Kanarrville, and the county would have to vote to support the project.

“We feel like this is a great opportunity for our public, but ultimately you’re going to be the ones that are going to pay for the bill and you’re going to be the ones that are going to make that decision,” Monroe added.

A table along the back of the Great Hall was available for guests at the meeting to write additional questions, so that District staff can answer the questions in the coming days. Monroe said those who want to learn more are invited to visit www.cicwcd.org or follow the Central Iron County Water Conservancy District’s YouTube channel, where a full recording of the meeting is available, as well as the 10-minute video that was shown at the meeting.

“We have learned there are several outside environmental groups and special interest groups opposing this project,” Monroe said. “We ask our community members to look to credible sources to get their information.”

The Central Iron County Water Conservancy District (CICWCD) is charged with conserving, developing and stabilizing the Cedar Valley water supply for the benefit of all current and future water users/consumers in the region. The Water District educates residents about conservation, reuse and water import strategies as it strives to meet the challenges of an overdrawn aquifer, climate changes, community growth and residential development. Efforts include sustaining and bolstering the declining aquifer with recharge projects, designing personalized home water use plans and managing the Pine Valley Water Supply Project for meeting Cedar Valley’s water needs into the future.

To Get to Know Your H2O and learn more about how to conserve water, visit www.cicwcd.org.

Photo Captions:

Photo 1-

A panel of local leaders and water experts answered pre-submitted questions from the community at a Dec. 7 water meeting. Rob Dotson, left, Paul Monroe, Nathan Moses, David Tufte, and Terri Hartley participated, and Chris Holmes served as moderator.

Photo 2-

More than 400 people attended the community water meeting on Dec. 7 to learn about local water challenges and solutions.

Media Contact:

Jessica Staheli
(435) 865-9901
jessica@cicwcd.org