



IRON COUNTY WATER STEWARDS
RECOGNIZING: DAVID TUFTE

Iron County Water Stewards

Recognizing Dr. David Tufte

In 2018, the Central Iron County Water Conservancy District formed a Water Advisory Committee, drawing on the expertise of a variety of community leaders and experts, to ensure it was moving in the right direction and explore solutions for the Cedar Valley's water future.

Dr. David Tufte, an economist and professor at Southern Utah University, was one of the Water Advisory Committee members. He learned about the valley's water supply, challenges such as

the over-drawn aquifer and the state's groundwater management plan, and the District's efforts.

Tufte said he was amazed the District had the foresight to file an application for water rights in the West Desert in 2006. This was long before 2021 brought Cedar Valley's worst drought on record, rising temperatures and monsoon storms causing damaging floods.

"There are zero plans or possibilities on the table that are competitive with the Pine Valley Water Supply Project," he said.

He added that he is impressed with all the conservation work the District has done thus far, and supports the plan to both continue that work and import water from Pine Valley.

Through aquifer recharge projects, in the past five years the District has conserved more than 14,000 acre-feet of water that would otherwise have evaporated from dry lake beds.

Additionally, the District has supported agricultural efficiency programs to help farmers optimize the water they are using and pump less from the underground supply. Paul Monroe, General Manager for the Central Iron County Water Conservancy District, serves on the Agricultural Water Optimization Task Force for the state of Utah.

Tufte said while the area continues to grow, the state's Groundwater Management Plan, which reduces usable water rights drastically over the next 59 years, is basically an indirect population control plan unless more water is imported. Housing costs, which have increased drastically in the past year, will only get higher if water is not available for more housing. Conservation, while important, cannot by itself solve the area's problems.

To stop depleting the aquifer, consumption of water in the valley would need to go from an average of 28,000 acre-feet per year to 21,000 acre-feet per year, or less, and that would need to happen quickly. That would not account for anyone moving in or children growing up.

“Each additional person added to our valley requires more conservation in a never-ending process,” Tufte said. “Any proposal to (only) conserve more ultimately becomes a requirement to limit population.”

Population increases have their challenges, and elected officials, including regional city council members and county commissioners, serve as decision makers regarding growth.

Meanwhile, the District’s legislative mandate is to ensure water will be available for the area for the next 50 years and to scale to meet the region’s growing needs. While the District’s efforts are being attacked by outside environmental activist groups that are not based in Southern Utah (some posing as local conservative groups), Tufte said it is important to look at what the District is actually doing to solve problems. The Central Iron County Water Conservancy District has been working toward solutions since its formation in 1997, with significant and measurable progress being made in recent years in areas of conservation, reuse and recharge strategies.

“There’s a big difference between wanting to make a difference and actually taking actions to make a difference,” he said. “It is important to acknowledge both the proactive conservation work the District has done, and that the Pine Valley project addresses shortcomings with that approach.”

Tufte will be a panelist at the District’s upcoming community meeting about critical water challenges and solutions, including the Pine Valley Water Supply Project. Presentations will be given by Monroe and Nathan Moses, Regional Engineer from the Utah Division of Water Rights. A panel of experts will then answer questions submitted by community members.

The meeting will be Dec. 7 at 6:30 p.m. in Southern Utah University’s Hunter Conference Center Great Hall. All are welcome. Questions may be submitted at <https://cicwcd.org/pvwsproject> or in writing at the District Office, 88 E. Fiddlers Canyon Road, Ste. 220.

The purpose of the Iron County Water Stewards program is to recognize community members for contributing to the effort to optimize every drop of water in Iron County. The Central Iron County Water Conservancy District (CICWCD) is actively engaged in education, conservation, reuse and import projects to meet the growing demands on local water supply.

For every effort you make to conserve, we consider you a water steward, too. To Get to Know Your H2O, visit <https://cicwcd.org/>.

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