

Green Book revamp to be divided up

Brooks describes process as 'divide & conquer' approach among Inyo County and LADWP technical staffs

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A good way to drown in details and debate is to just dive into the most critical and complex water issues in the Owens Valley without a plan that all sides can grab onto and use as a lifesaver.

Over the past several months, a detailed plan has emerged that outlines the process that will be used to modify, update and maybe even overhaul the Green Book. If the work plan works the way it's planned, technical

staff — hydrologists, soil scientists, geologists, biologists — will do the work to revise the Green Book and there won't be a lawyer in sight to gum up the effort.

However, there could be plenty of facilitators and outside scientists stepping in to keep the technical talks moving between the staffs of the Inyo County Water Department and the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power.

It could take up to three years to complete the Green Book revisions, and LADWP has agreed to pick up the tab for most of the work.

If successful, the Green Book revamp might totally alter the technical guidelines for groundwater pumping, measuring wellfield and vegetation stress, and do away with the current "on-off" pumping protocols that both sides agree simply do not work well to either protect the environment or provide a predictable supply of

water for Los Angeles. Such wholesale changes would not only effectively replace the current Green Book, but would also replace the strictures of the Drought Recovery Policy.

The process also provides for the public to get a chance to discuss the direction of the ongoing work, and comment on the final products.

One key to the plan is that there will be "products," plural, generated by numerous groups, said Inyo County Water Department Director Tom Brooks at a recent Water Commission meeting.

The plan envisions "three or four groups" working on different aspects or sections of the Green Book, which outlines the technical guidelines and restrictions on groundwater pumping and water management issues in Inyo County.

"Divide and conquer," was how Brooks explained the reasoning behind having several groups work-

ing on different parts of the Green Book at the same time. Plus, the work should move quicker if it involves relatively small groups of staff working in their area of expertise, he noted.

Officially known as the "Framework and Guidelines for Revising the Green Book," the entire effort will be conducted as "a management directed approach," Brooks noted, meaning that he and Gene Coufal, his counterpart at LADWP, will just make a management decision that staff time will be allocated to the Green Book work.

"There are several charms" to that approach, said Brooks, primary among them that it limits the involvement of lawyers and politicians in the process, since there are no contracts or official agreements that need ratified by said lawyers and politicians. The process, instead, is driven by Brooks and Coufal agreeing to the

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framework and work process, then assigning appropriate staff to go ahead and do the work.

That was one reason it took staff from both agencies some time to agree on the framework and process.

The Water Commission unanimously endorsed the proposed framework for revising the Green Book.

Commissioner Terri Cawelti said she was encouraged to see the process moving forward, and "liked the idea of letting staff do its job" without any help from lawyers.

One of the first decisions was an agreement by LADWP that the Green Book work would fall under the heading of "cooperative studies" in the Inyo-L.A. Long-Term Water Agreement. As such the cost of facilitators and other expenses will be paid by LADWP.

The framework is fairly straightforward.

The staffs from LADWP and the county Water Department will come up with a range of projects concerning portions of the Green Book needing revision. The Inyo-L.A. Technical Group will then assign that project to project managers. Those project managers will then put together a "working group" to tackle the project.

By working on the problem at a staff level, in confidence, each staff member can "speak their mind openly and do good technical work" without external pressures, said Brooks.

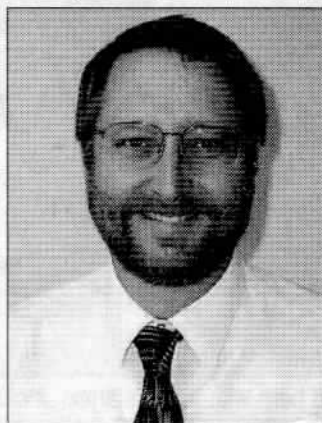
Each work group will develop a detailed work plan outlining how it will approach the problem, what it expects to produce, the resources it needs, a schedule and a budget.

Facilitators will play a significant role within each

group when the work bogs down. First, the outside voices will help "balance the discussion," since LADWP can assign more people to each work group than Inyo County, Brooks said.

Plus, "we're anticipating some difficult discussions" during the revision process, he noted.

The facilitators will not be pressed to find a "consensus," Brooks pointed out, but will try to keep the exchange



Tom Brooks

of ideas and work flowing.

If a work group hits a real snag, there is an "impasse process" outlined to keep the work moving or get the situation dealt with.

The work group and facilitator would report the impasse to the project managers from both sides, who then take the matter to the Technical Group with a recommendation or possible resolution. The Tech Group can make a decision on the question, or clarify some points in contention and send the work group back to work.

If the Tech Group discovers the impasse involves a significant, scientific technical disagreement, it can move to a "peer review" process and bring in outside consultants or experts to address the technical questions.

Or, if the matter in dispute involves a "policy disagreement," the Technical Group

would send that decision up to the Inyo-L.A. Standing Committee for a decision on the policy in question.

The best part of the "impasse process," Brooks said, is that it can keep the work moving, since an impasse with one group will not impact the other groups. Plus, it is designed to quickly figure out if the sticking point involves science or policy, and has a process to deal with both potential problems. Once that one problem or dispute is carved out of the working group's plan, it can go ahead with the rest of its task while the single disputed area is handled through other means, he noted.

Under the plan, the Technical Group would meet in public at least every two months to review the progress of the work being done and assign new work if necessary. The Tech Group would function much like an overall manager for the entire effort, Brooks said, and would oversee progress, address problems and make decisions to keep the work moving. Brooks said the public will have an opportunity to monitor and comment on the work being done when those status reports, disputes or agreements come to the Tech Group.

Eventually, any changes to the Green Book will have to run through the full gamut of public hearings and comment, in Los Angeles and in Inyo County. The Technical Group and the Standing Committee would have to approve the changes, as would the L.A. Board of Water and Power Commissioners and the Inyo County Board of Supervisors.

The Standing Committee will get its first look at the framework for revising the Green Book at its Nov. 27 meeting in Los Angeles.