

Our Ocean Backyard — *Santa Cruz Sentinel* columns by Gary Griggs, Director, Institute of Marine Sciences, UC Santa Cruz.

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Water- Looking to the Future

Some years ago, a friend who had been on the City Council and also served as mayor told me something he had learned serving on the Council- that the first natural impulse with any controversial issue is to draw a line, pick a side and fight it out. He realized this is what often happens, but that it is divisive, unproductive and also quickly eliminates any chance of finding a common solution. What we need to do instead, he explained, is to draw a circle and put us all inside, so we have to work together to figure out a solution.

This is much easier said than done, however, and there are many groups as well as individuals who haven't figured this out yet. We seem to have lost the ability to compromise today. I'm right, you're wrong; you are with me or you are against me.

Perhaps a good way to start any dialogue, and I'm going to stay local here, is to try to find common ground and work from there. Given our present situation, let's focus on water. We're still in a drought and could be for some time. Our future water supplies are of interest to us all, so finding areas of agreement is a good starting point. The City Water Supply Advisory Committee is a great example of a broad-based group of citizens who were all put in a circle to try to understand our water system, our supply and demands, and finally, make recommendations for the most sensible options for the city to pursue.

Everyone would agree that we need water, in our own homes, gardens, schools, hospitals, and businesses. It also is clear at the moment during dry years, or during multiple dry years, that there isn't enough water to provide for the amounts we are used to. In a recent phone survey (reported in the Fall SC Municipal Utilities Review), future water supplies surfaced as the top concern, with 77% of those surveyed indicating that this is a "very serious" issue.

Fifty-one percent strongly agreed with the statement "I've already cut back on water use for my home as much as I can; there is not much more I can do to save water". Sixty percent of those surveyed felt "we need to find new sources of water if we are going to solve our long-term water supply problems". Sixty-nine percent

strongly agreed with the statement “we need to have a more stable and predictable supply of water whether or not we are experiencing drought conditions”.

There seems to be broad agreement that water conservation is a way of life that we all should adopt, but during repeated drought years, water conservation alone isn't going to be enough.

A number of local civic and business leaders recently went to Santa Barbara on a Chamber of Commerce visit and heard how that city has diversified its water supply sources, which include two reservoirs, groundwater, a connection to the state water project, recycled water, and desalination.

Santa Barbara has a plan in place for which sources will provide their water supply each year in the future assuming they may have a six-year drought starting at any time. The relative security of their water supply is the result of a long-term public commitment to 1) diversifying sources, and 2) strategic management of those sources and their delivery systems.

The city of Santa Cruz is served today by essentially the same water supply system that we had 50 years ago, although our population has more than doubled. As a result, our drought response is necessarily limited to use reduction. I think the goal we should be working towards is to diversify our water supply system, as some other communities have done. The Water Supply Advisory Committee is getting lots of suggestions on how to do just that.

A number of friends and readers have suggested that I pull all of these stories together into a book. We have just assembled the first six and a half years of the columns into a book, *Our Ocean Backyard- Collected Essays*, which will be available on-line November 29th. Printed copies should be available in local bookstores the following week with an e-book a bit later.