

## PRESS RELEASE

### **AWA APPROVES HIRING FREEZE, REDUCES DIRECTOR COMPENSATION**

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*(Sutter Creek)* In ongoing efforts to cut costs to meet reduced revenues, AWA Directors approved a hiring freeze at the Agency and reduced their own compensation at their Board meeting Thursday. The Agency has been operating under an unofficial hiring freeze for two years. The temporary policy adopted Thursday formalizes the policy and aligns the Water Agency with Amador County government's hiring freeze.

AWA General Manager Gene Mancebo noted that the Agency has been reducing staffing over the past few years through voluntary and non-voluntary means, resulting in a 20% reduction in staffing since 2008. These positions are being held vacant, given the current economic and financial conditions facing the Agency at this time. Under the new policy, the general manager will bring any proposal to fill job vacancies to the Board for consideration on a case-by-case basis.

Board members also reduced their own pay and eliminated the Directors' benefit package at Thursday's meeting. The Board approved a maximum compensation for seven meetings per month for Directors, down from ten meetings per month. Reimbursement for the Board president will remain at a maximum of ten meetings. Directors are paid \$119.80 per meeting day.

The Board also approved dropping all benefits (health, dental and life insurance coverage) for the five Directors. District 1 Director Paul Molinelli had already made a campaign commitment to refuse any compensation for his service on the Board.

A voluntary water conservation notice is still in effect for AWA customers along the Highway 88 corridor from Mace Meadow down to Pine Grove.

Recent heavy rains have filled water treatment plant backwash ponds at Mace Meadow Golf Course, triggering the need for an emergency contingency plan as determined by the Regional Water Quality Control Board. To prevent the ponds from spilling over into nearby creeks, the plan requires the Water Agency to ask for voluntary water conservation by all public water customers of Mace Meadow Mutual Water Co., Rabb Park Community Services District, Pine Grove Community Services District and AWA's CAWP Retail System.

AWA Operations Manager Chris McKeage told Directors he's working with the state water board on permissible temporary options for disposing of the excess water. One option could be running the water to a nearby leach field. Trucking the water to a wastewater treatment plant was discussed, but McKeage says the Agency has yet to locate a plant that can take what is essentially raw Mokelumne River water, due to permit or capacity issues.

McKeage also reported that AWA has purchased a second-hand filtration plant to recycle the backwash water at the Buckhorn Water Treatment Plant. Recycling the backwash water will greatly reduce the amount of water sent to the Mace Meadow pond, partially alleviating the winter overflow problem in the future.

The used filtration plant cost \$5,000 and will require an estimated \$65,000 of AWA staff time and materials to get the equipment on-line, which McKeage hopes will be in mid-February. McKeage estimated that a new plant would have cost as much as \$250,000 before installation.

Also at Thursday's Board meeting:

- The AWA Board approved supporting Assembly Bill No. 8, sponsored by Assembly Member Alyson Huber, which will halt the closure of Preston Youth Correction Facility for six months to allow additional analysis of the impacts of the closure. The Agency expects to lose approximately \$80,000 in annual revenues from water sales to the Preston facility, and an additional estimated \$40,000 from indirect impacts of the closure.
- The Amador Water Agency Board recognized retired District 5 Director Terry Moore for his 12 years of service. Moore was instrumental in the development and completion of the Plymouth Pipeline and the Buckhorn Water Treatment Plant, the Amador Transmission Pipeline, Regional Wastewater and Recycling Master Plan, guiding the development of the Gravity Supply Line, and serving several years as Board president. Moore thanked AWA staff for their efforts in assisting Directors in their governance and gave some advice to the new Board: move away from the day to day workings of the Agency and look at the big picture issues, such as consolidation of the four water systems, getting a storage tank in the upcountry, and getting the Lake Camanche system off of well water and onto a surface water supply.

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