

Fall Sacramento Meeting Highlights

by Charles M. Burt, Conference Co-Chair, Irrigation Training & Research Center, San Luis Obispo, California
The Theme of the October 2017 USCID Conference in Sacramento was *Finding the Balance — Improving Infrastructure, Water Management, and the Environment in a World with Limited Funding and Ample Regulations*.

The Conference did indeed get close to finding the perfect balance for content and organization. Some key numbers:

Attendees: 215

Exhibits: 23

Poster presentations: 32, including 30 Cal Poly students

Planning committee members: 22, from seven states composed of consultants, government employees and irrigation district personnel

But it was much more than the numbers. There was visible enthusiasm by attendees from the beginning to the end. The topics were nothing short of interesting, and this was definitely not a sit-and-listen Conference. Debate and clarification among panel members and between the audience and presenters was cordial and active.

Tuesday Field Tour

As usual, the Conference began with a field trip to Yolo County Flood Control and Water Conservation District. District Manager **Tim O'Halloran** and his staff provided an excellent overview of their unique SCADA system and automation progress, while also covering the unique governance of the district as a county agency. Of particular interest was the involvement of the district in groundwater management and conjunctive use — a strong theme throughout the Conference. The tour started at the District's office with briefings by Assistant General Manager Max Stevenson and SCADA Operations Supervisor Tim Ireland. The group then proceeded to the Winters Canal, a 100-year-old, 16-mile-long canal that has recently been retrofitted with 25 automatic level/flow control gates. Sites visited included the Fredric Flume and the School House Check.

Technical Sessions

Three main themes throughout the Conference involved the complexity of managing surface water and groundwater supplies as a whole, while attempting to improve the environment and still retain an adequate and economical supply for agriculture. The panel and papers were organized to provide an integrated view of these themes.

Thirty-six papers or panel participants explicitly dealt with water balance and conjunctive use issues. These presentations addressed real and current problems, along with solutions.

Six special sessions were provided on the “technical basics” of Understanding, Completing, and Implementing State and Federal Water Management Plans. The targeted audience was districts, agencies, and consultants. Sessions were intended to fill in the blanks on technical issues encountered in developing various water management plans. Presenters included **Hicham Eltal** (Merced ID) who discussed objective based/benefits of water management plans; **Bryan Thoreson** (Davids Engineering), on water balances, **Bekele Temesgen** (California DWR) on ET approaches and DWR plan submission; **Stuart Styles** (Cal Poly ITRC) on measuring surface inflows/outflows to a district, **Charles Burt** (Cal Poly ITRC) on groundwater, and **Gary Kienlen** (MBK Engineers) on Efficient Water Management Practices.

A special topic dealt with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) irrigation projects encompassing more than 700,000 irrigated acres in the west — a little-known but important aspect of western U.S. irrigation. Presentations were provided regarding the Ute Indian Water Rights (Lee Baxter, USBR), separating livestock water from irrigation water in Duck Valley (Reggie Premo, Duck Valley Indian Reservation), rehabilitation of laterals of the Gila River Indian Community (David Phelps and Bill Eden, Stantec and P-M Irrigation Project), and overall funding challenges of BIA (Charles Burt, Cal Poly ITRC).

Perhaps one of the more interesting subjects was the huge variation between states in how groundwater is dealt with in state water law. **Laura Schroeder** (Schroeder Law Offices) succinctly summarized groundwater law in the western U.S.; **Ralph Scanga** (Upper Arkansas Water Conservancy District) described the complexity of inter-state relationships, and Rebecca Shortt (Ontario, Canada) provided a view of Ontario water governance.

Steve Macaulay and Bob Anderson (Geosyntec Consultants) and others addressed the difficulties and benefits associated with groundwater/surface water modeling. They stressed the need for using good judgment and overall understanding, rather than relying only on model results.

Friday Field Tour

The Conference ended with a full-day field trip to irrigated areas of the Sacramento Valley. Rice is a major crop in the Valley, but the area is quickly seeing crop diversification. Various agencies have learned to work cooperatively in developing win/win meaningful programs to enhance fish, waterfowl and other wildlife habitat while simultaneously improving irrigation.

Conclusion

The integrated themes of the presentations and the practical knowledge imparted by the speakers and moderators kept the conference moving from beginning to end. Special thanks go to Thad Bettner, Manager of Glenn-Colusa Irrigation District, who was Conference Co-Chair and responsible for many final details required to have a very successful Conference.☐