

Fire & Water

Preparing now for the future

Project underway to sustain Big Bear's water supply

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The 2018-19 winter in California has all but ended the drought. But the next one could start tomorrow, according to Reggie Lamson, general manager of the Big Bear Lake Department of Water and Power. Lamson is also involved with the Replenish Big Bear project, which is part of a joint powers authority charged with sustaining the water supply in the Valley.

Replenish Big Bear will do just that using a one-water, multi-benefit approach. Lamson spoke to the Big Bear Association of Realtors in early March regarding the progress of the Replenish Big Bear project and what it means for Big Bear's water supply and sustaining that supply.

Lamson said Replenish Big Bear is the most economical way to use treated waste water in a number of ways to protect the natural resource. Under this project's umbrella, water



KATHY PORTIE/Big Bear Grizzly

Stanfield Marsh and Baker Pond have shown new life after a wet winter in Big Bear Valley. The area is a vital player in the Replenish Big Bear project.

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FIRE AND WATER

Sustainability the goal for Big Bear Valley water agencies

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can be used for the stickleback fish in the East Valley. Reclaimed water can keep Stanfield Marsh full as a wildlife preserve, provide irrigation for the Bear Mountain Golf Course and water for snowmaking. The project can also provide more water for habitats along the Santa Ana River, can keep Big Bear Lake full and enhance the quality of the water in the lake.

Big Bear's population of unarmored threespined stickleback fish is currently supported with domestic or drinking water provided by the Big Bear City Community Services District. Eight percent of the CSD's water supply goes to the stickleback pond, Lamson said.

Replenish Big Bear would use reclaimed water to keep a 10-acre stickleback habitat full preserving the domestic water supply for the community.

Stanfield Marsh is a federally regulated preserve. "When it's dry, it's just a pile of dirt," Lamson said. The Army Corps of Engineers, Fish and Wildlife and the Big Bear Municipal Water District spent a lot of money to create the preserve, he said. The project would keep water in Stanfield Marsh, also known as Baker Pond, to protect the preserve and provide habitat for wildlife.

Basically, the project starts with closing the loop that sends millions of gallons of water off the mountain. Big Bear Area Regional Wastewater Agency sends treated wastewater to Lucerne Valley to irrigate alfalfa fields. BBARWA owns the land and it is "phenomenally economical to discharge there, but it breaks the water cycle," Lamson said.

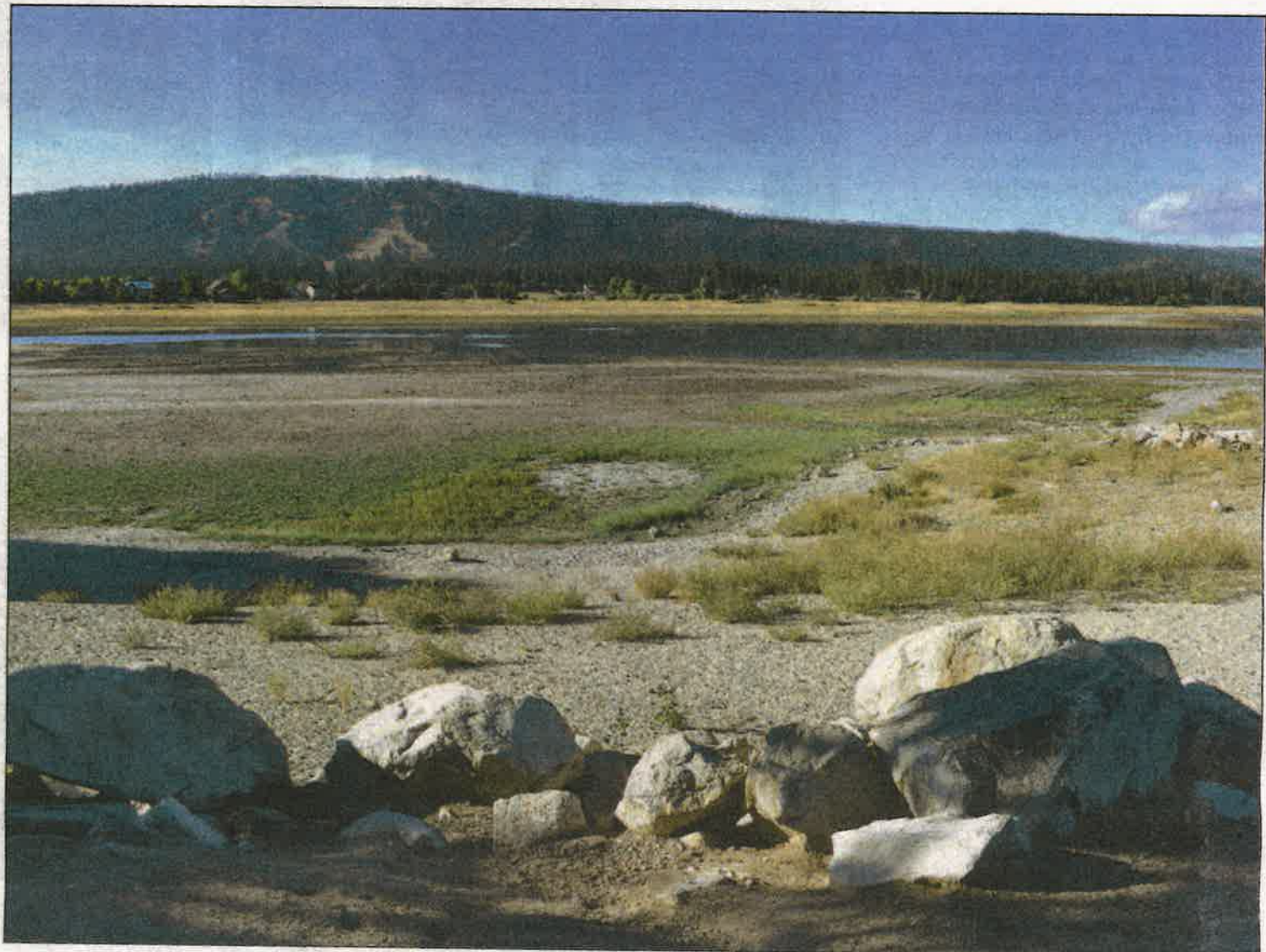
Using advanced treatment technology, the water that is being sent to Lucerne Valley will produce some 600 million gallons of water that will remain in Big Bear. That water will exceed the drinking water standards, according to Lamson and David Lawrence, general manager of BBARWA. BBARWA, DWP, CSD and MWD are the partners in the joint powers agency.

The treated water that is pumped into Stanfield March will also flow into Big Bear Lake to stabilize lake levels. Lamson said that the recent snow and rain that have helped to fill Big Bear Lake are actually better for the project. He called it perfect timing.

In October, Lamson, Lawrence, Mike Stephenson of MWD and Mary Reeves of CSD outlined the project and its benefits, as well as some challenges. At that time, the lake level was nearing an historic low for modern times since the 1977 judgement was secured by the MWD and down the hill water owners.

Stephenson, who is general manager for the MWD, said Replenish Big Bear creates new water. The treated water is of such high quality, it's too high quality to discharge into Big Bear Lake. However, Lamson said the requirement to percolate recycled water at a 20 percent recycled to 80 percent surface water, by adding 2 million gallons of water in Big Bear Lake per day, "the lake becomes a big mixing bowl."

Keeping Big Bear Lake between 3 and 5 feet from full would allow for down stream controlled releases and basically flush the lake, Lamson said.



KATHY PORTE/Big Bear Grizzly

Big Bear Lake was nearly dry as recent as last October near the East Boat Launch. Replenish Big Bear is a proposal that could improve lake levels even during drought years.



It greatly enhances the quality of the lake, he said.

Replenish Big Bear comes with a hefty price tag. Grants, low interest loans and a number of other resources are being utilized to keep the cost to the Valley's property owners low. The first step, the environmental impact report, should be completed this year, Lamson said.

Following the EIR, the goal is to have engineering and a pilot treatment facility in place by 2020. Final design is slated for 2021 with construction slated to begin in 2022.

While the project takes time and money, Lamson reminded the audience at the real estate breakfast "The next drought is probably next Wednesday." He said it's never wise to say the drought is over.

For more information on Replenish Big Bear, visit www.replenishbigbear.com.

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