

Section 1

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to document the stakeholder-centered process used by Butte County to develop water resources policy recommendations for consideration by the Butte County Board of Supervisors. This Integrated Water Resources Plan (Plan) is part of Butte County's proactive Integrated Water Resources Program. Figure 1-1 shows Butte County's location within northern California.



Figure 1-1
Butte County Vicinity Map

1.1 Background

The 1987-1994 drought created significant challenges for water users across California and throughout Butte County. The length and intensity of the drought caused a dramatic decrease in water supplies in many areas. Water purveyors with diminished supplies looked to other water users with superior water rights and water contracts as potential sources of additional supplies. Within Butte County, several local agencies sold water to the State Drought Water Bank; however, other residents expressed concern that these transfers resulted in negative effects on nearby groundwater users.

The effects of the drought, however, were not all negative. A positive outcome of the drought was an increased awareness of the need for local water resource protection and management. In November 1996, Butte County acted to protect local groundwater resources by enacting a groundwater conservation ordinance, codified in Chapter 33 of the Butte County Code. The ordinance's objective is to provide groundwater conservation through local regulation of water transfers outside of the county with a groundwater component. A permit is now required for both exportation of groundwater outside the county and groundwater pumping as a substitute for surface water exported outside the county.

In July 1999, the Butte County Board of Supervisors approved the formation of the Butte County Department of Water and Resource Conservation (DW&RC). The mission of the DW&RC is "to manage and conserve water and other resources for the citizens of Butte County." Since its inception, the DW&RC has focused on coordinating local water resource management.

The DW&RC's mission statement does not provide specific guidance regarding the management of resources. The DW&RC determined that it needed additional guidance from County residents regarding water management activities and priorities. To gather the information necessary to set a course for protection and management of resources, the DW&RC initiated the Integrated Water Resources Program described in Section 1.3. The DW&RC received funding for the program from the California Department of Water Resources. Part of this program is this Integrated Water Resources Plan, which presents policy recommendations developed through close collaboration with a diverse stakeholder group. The Plan is intended to provide direction for resource protection and management into the future.

1.2 Previous Related Documents

As one of its initial planning efforts, the DW&RC documented current countywide water resources in two reports: the *Butte County Water Inventory and Analysis* (CDM 2001); and the *Butte County Groundwater Inventory* (DWR 2001). The analyses supporting these documents estimated urban, agricultural, and environmental water demands, and compared these demands to supplies in average and dry conditions. These reports also included descriptions of the County's physical setting, water rights

and contracts, water purveyors, watershed and environmental organizations, and water management issues.

The *Butte County Water Inventory and Analysis* documented the existing conditions within the County, and served as a starting point for this report. Understanding existing physical and political conditions was a necessary first step in developing a Plan for future water resources policies.

1.3 Integrated Water Resources Program

The DW&RC has initiated an Integrated Water Resources Program that includes multiple water resources-related components. Figure 1-1, at the end of this section, depicts each of the current Program components and graphically represents the relationship between this Plan and other Program components. The DW&RC initiated Program components parallel with the Plan because they are necessary to support proactive water management.

The Study Team, composed of DW&RC and its consultants, is working to complete the technical tasks associated with all of the Program components. The components of the Integrated Water Resources Program are available for public review at Butte County libraries in Biggs, Chico, Durham, Gridley, Oroville, Paradise, and in the Meriam Library Special Collections Section on the campus of California State University-Chico. Copies of these plans are also available at the DW&RC's library, at www.buttecounty.net/waterandresource, or at Butte Environmental Council's office at 116 West 2nd Street, Suite 3 in Chico.

The following sections describe the efforts underway for several of the Program components, including the AB3030 Groundwater Management Plan, the Groundwater Basin Management Objectives process, and the Drought Management Plan. Each of these components, either in whole or part, provides information that supports the development and implementation of this Integrated Water Resources Plan. Information from these other Program efforts assisted the Steering Committee of local water resource stakeholders in the formulation of plan objectives, options, and associated policy recommendations.

1.3.1 Groundwater Management Plan

On August 26, 2003, the Butte County Board of Supervisors formally approved resolution 03-134, directing the DW&RC to develop a countywide AB 3030 Groundwater Management Plan (GMP). The GMP documents the County's existing groundwater management programs, and explains potential future actions that could increase the effectiveness of groundwater management. The DW&RC is currently performing most of the required and recommended components of an AB 3030 Plan. For example, the DW&RC monitors an extensive groundwater level and quality monitoring network, and has worked with other entities to collect and disseminate water quality and quantity data. Additionally, the DW&RC assists other entities within the County with locally-driven groundwater management activities.

1.3.2 Drought Management Plan

The DW&RC has prepared a Drought Management Plan to reduce short- and long-term impacts of drought to Butte County. The Drought Management Plan includes a procedure for monitoring climatic conditions that may foreshadow drought and formalizes the institutional structure and associated responsibilities that the County will act under during drought. The DW&RC intends to minimize the effect of drought on residents of Butte County through the early detection of drought conditions and the establishment of drought management procedures prior to experiencing the next drought.

1.3.3 Groundwater Basin Management Objectives

The County Board of Supervisors enacted a Groundwater Management Ordinance (Ordinance 3869) in February 2004 that includes the development and monitoring of groundwater basin management objectives (BMOs) associated with groundwater levels, groundwater quality, and land subsidence. The emphasis of the BMO development process is local control, as representatives (including well owners) from each area will develop BMOs appropriate for their area. Each area can establish the BMO for one or more wells within the area and pursue its specific groundwater management goals, as long as their actions do not negatively affect neighboring areas. The BMO concept overcomes many of the common difficulties associated with defining safe yield and overdraft in a groundwater basin.

The DW&RC has produced a *BMO Development Packet* for each of the 16 sub-areas overlying the groundwater basin to assist BMO planners with the development of BMOs for their individual areas. BMO planners will be citizens who reside, own property, or have principal places of business in the areas they represent, and will be selected by residents in each sub-area. The DW&RC will provide the BMO planners with their area-specific *BMO Development Packets*, and will offer technical assistance as the BMO planners develop management objectives.

1.4 Uses of this Document

The strength and principal utility of this Plan is derived from the planning process. A local Steering Committee, representing broad-based interests, developed and prioritized water management objectives, potential options that could be pursued to accomplish the plan objectives, and water management policies that can be adopted in support of the plan objectives. The Steering Committee members brought various opinions and preferences to the planning process, yet share a common vision of protecting a resource critical to sustaining the quality of life enjoyed by residents of Butte County.

The DW&RC will implement the Steering Committee's policy recommendations following consideration by the Water Commission, recommendation by the Water Commission to the Board of Supervisors, and consideration and adoption of suggested policies by the Board of Supervisors.

