

# **Pinal County Local Drought Impact Group Minutes of the September 6<sup>th</sup>, 2006 Meeting**

*Minutes prepared by Arnie Schlittenhart, Natural Resource Conservation District*

**Present:** Susan Craig – ADWR, Evelyn Erlandsen – ADWR, Tom Evans – National Weather Service, Bill Garfield – AZ Water Company, Rick Gibson – U of A Cooperative Extension, Bruce Hallin – Salt River Project, Deborah Hopkins – Farm Service Agency, Doug Mason – San Carlos Irrigation District, Bryant Ridgeway – Pinal County Resident, Marjie Risk – ADWR, Arnie Schlittenhart – Zone 7A NRCD's, Pete Weaver – Pinal County Emergency Manager

The meeting was convened at Central Arizona College, room M101, and called to order at 3:10 PM.

## **I. Welcome & Introductions**

-- Pete Weaver opened the meeting by outlining the purpose of the LDIG and followed by having the attendees introduce themselves and state their drought concerns.

## **II. Drought Agricultural Impacts**

-- Rick Gibson then addressed the meeting with regards to the current status of the drought. Rick pointed out that the agricultural sector of Pinal County varies widely from irrigated cropland to rainfall dependent ranches, and is probably the sector that feels the most immediate effects of a drought. Rick handed out some climatological data sheets detailing recent rainfall totals throughout the state along with historical rainfall data. Though the rainfall data reflected higher than average accumulations, Rick raised the concern that such data could be misconstrued as having ended the drought when, in fact, such data is inconclusive and it is much too early to determine any longer-term trends. As a result, Rick stated his contention that we need to continue to think and act in a drought mode, continuing to use every manner of water conservation.

-- Arnie Schlittenhart provided some insight into the agricultural community's efforts regarding water conservation. Arnie pointed out that Ag users have two driving incentives to conserve water. One is to maintain a constant supply of their water resources, without which they obviously could not operate. The second is the cost of water. Water costs for Ag have steadily risen as a result of increased demand, increased cost of delivery, and increased power costs. Arnie reported that, as a result, Ag users have been pro-active in implementing water conservation measures on the ground such as land leveling, ditch lining, sprinkler systems, and drip irrigation systems. Arnie also mentioned that Ag's use of refined irrigation management techniques, utilizing services such as the Irrigation Management Service, also aid in conserving water.

## **III. Flooding Does Not End Drought**

-- Dovetailing with Rick's comments, Pete Weaver provided a report on some of the weather events that transpired as a result of the active monsoon season. Pete displayed a number of pictures of flood damage that occurred throughout the county at various times

this summer. Pete mentioned that the Aravaipa Creek set a record for peak flow after some of the storms that occurred in the eastern portion of the county. Rick raised the question as to how much of the runoff from this summer's storms actually recharges the groundwater aquifer? No one at the meeting was able to answer that question. The discussion then turned to the possibility of capturing storm water.

The ultimate result of this would be the creation of a new reservoir(s). It was the consensus of those present that the current political climate in the state leaves this option completely infeasible. An alternate idea that was floated was one of constructing catchments and channels within flood plains in order to divert storm runoff into groundwater recharge locations.

#### **IV. Statewide Conservation Efforts**

-- Marjie Risk, representing the Arizona Department of Water Resources – Statewide Conservation Office, provided a slide presentation outlining the State government's efforts and commitment to water conservation and some of the methods that are being implemented towards that end. The three major areas of focus of the Statewide Conservation Office are 1.) Technical assistance 2.) Dissemination of educational materials 3.) Financial assistance. Marjie highlighted the "Rinse Smart" program that her office has successfully implemented in which restaurant dish rooms are outfitted with high pressure, low volume water nozzles that are used to pre-rinse dishes. The program has proven to save upwards of 40 % of the water normally used in this process.

#### **V. Review of Steering Committee Applications**

-- Pete Weaver read a list of those who have applied to serve on the Steering Committee. The Pinal County Board of Supervisors must approve this list. Some uncertainty still remained as to the number of applicants to serve from each affiliation.

#### **VI. Workgroup Participation**

-- Susan Craig reviewed the Workgroup Breakout list and the timeline for the progress of the LDIG. She encouraged the LDIG to begin the process of establishing specific viable objectives for managing drought within Pinal County. Susan reiterated the scope and charge of the LDIG as being:

- 1.) An outreach to the community in disseminating drought information and increasing drought awareness
- 2.) A monitoring vehicle to assess what is happening on the ground, from both an economic and societal perspective
- 3.) A vehicle for responding to and mitigating the effects of drought

It was decided that the various Workgroups need to meet before the next meeting in order to provide some specific insight and guidance from which objectives can be developed. Susan voiced her concern over the lack of participation thus far in the LDIG. She asked for suggestions as to how to encourage more people to become involved in this process. One suggestion was to invite businesses that use large volumes of water such as resorts, power companies and developers.

**VII. Next Steps**

It was decided that the Workgroups will schedule to meet in October followed by a LDIG meeting in November, tentatively scheduled for November 15.

The meeting concluded at 5:00 PM.