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**Indian Wells Valley Groundwater Authority:
A New Model for Peaceful Resolution of Water Disputes**

At the June 14, 2023, meeting of the Indian Wells Valley Groundwater Authority (IWVGA) Board of Directors, General Counsel Keith Lemieux had some very surprising news to report. It seems that, in addition to working for the Groundwater Authority, Mr. Lemieux also represents clients in the Las Posas Basin in Ventura County. As in our local basin, the Las Posas Basin is managed by a groundwater authority -- in this case the Fox Canyon Groundwater Management Agency. Also like our basin, certain unsatisfied pumpers had filed a groundwater adjudication to resolve water rights in the basin -- resulting in expensive litigation. Mr. Lemieux reported to the IWVGA Board that this lawsuit had been recently settled and that the settlement had been approved by the court.

This was good news, at least for the Las Posas folks, but what was really of interest to the IWVGA Board and community was this: Mr. Lemieux stated that the Las Posas settlement used our IWVGA public engagement structure to help resolve its water dispute. It seems that in the Las Posas Basin, the Fox Canyon GMA leaders were concerned with improving public participation in the process. They wanted to make sure that their settlement improved the public's ability to comment on and participate in groundwater management matters. And to meet that objective they looked to our local IWVGA efforts.

IWVGA has long had a Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) made up of local citizens with an interest in groundwater management. In fact, the PAC is the successor to a prior organization of concerned citizens who have been vigilant about groundwater issues for decades. Mr. Lemieux revealed that with his assistance the Las Posas settlement incorporated IWVGA's PAC structure and process into its program as a means to increase public participation. He also noted that while the Indian Wells Valley groundwater issues seem to be contentious and unsolvable, other areas in the state are looking to us for solutions to their problems.

Mr. Lemieux also suggested that perhaps the Indian Wells Valley could look to Las Posas as a model to settle some of our problems. He mentioned that another part of the Las Posas settlement was an acceptance by the pumpers that the groundwater sustainability plan (GSP) adopted by Fox Canyon GMA would be the basis for the court's management of the basin going forward. Since IWVGA also has an approved GSP for our basin, Mr. Lemieux suggested that this resolution, if accepted by parties in court, could allow our local stakeholders to move past current disputes and put an end to expensive, ongoing and unnecessary litigation.

I support Mr. Lemieux's suggestion and encourage the IWVGA Board and other local parties to consider the Las Posas settlement – specifically the adoption of the basin's approved GSP as the court-approved management plan – as a model for resolving our local groundwater management conflicts. A plan that will end costly litigation and allow the Indian Wells Valley parties to move forward peacefully and collaboratively with sustainable groundwater management? Yes, please!



Carol Thomas-Keefer
General Manager
Indian Wells Valley Groundwater Authority

The Indian Wells Valley Groundwater Authority is a Groundwater Sustainability Agency tasked by the State to bring the Basin into sustainability. It is a joint powers authority consisting of the Counties of Kern, San Bernardino and Inyo; the City of Ridgecrest; and the Indian Wells Valley Water District. The U.S. Bureau of Land Management and the United States Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake are ex-officio members of the Authority.