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Water Considerations for Cities

The 2016-2017 Ventura County Grand Jury investigated whether Ventura County cities have adequately considered long-term water needs. The investigation examined existing urban water demand, future demand, and the potential sources of water.

California recently endured a five year drought. While the statewide drought has eased, conditions in the County have not returned to normal. Several of the County reservoirs remain significantly below capacity and it is not clear to what degree the recent rainfall will recharge the ground water basins. At the same time, the occurrence and duration of the next drought is unpredictable, creating an uncertain future regarding the availability of water in the County.

The Grand Jury requested each of the 10 incorporated cities in the County provide information on how they would meet water needs and conservation targets through 2026. The cities referred the Grand Jury to State mandated Urban Water Management Plans, which project future water needs and availability. The Grand Jury concluded these plans meet the minimum State requirements. However, the Grand Jury also concluded there is over reliance on increasing the amount of imported water, as well as some increased development of local resources through measures including desalination. Both additional importing and new local facilities will require expensive, and currently unfunded, infrastructure construction. In addition, the local water plans address the minimum state-required three-year drought scenarios, but none of the plans address a longer drought. The current drought has lasted over five years. Catastrophic water shortages do not appear to have been given high priority in the Urban Water Management Plans.

The Grand Jury recommends the 10 city councils collaborate with all the County water purveyors to develop long term plans to respond to catastrophic disruptions of water supplies and droughts exceeding three years. The Grand Jury further recommends the 10 city councils ensure all future water availability plans clearly identify any potential water sources that are based on unfunded or unpermitted infrastructure.

The complete report may be accessed at www.ventura.org/grand-jury; click on the Annual Reports tab and select "Fiscal Year 2016-2017."