



**FOCUS: Local  
Agriculture**

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# NID WaterWays

A Newsletter to the Customers  
of the Nevada Irrigation District

Volume 23 Number 2 Summer, 2002

## On the Farm *Irrigation Water is Key to Local Agriculture*

**T**he region served by the Nevada Irrigation District is among the greenest and most productive in the Sierra foothills. The area would be quite different if not for NID's network of reservoirs and canals.

Water collected and stored in NID mountain reservoirs is distributed to farms and ranches in Nevada and Placer counties through an extensive canal system. Parts of the canal system date to the Gold Rush and others have been added through the years to meet customer needs.

The value of the NID water supply was apparent June 18 as about 40 community leaders participated in the biannual Tour of Nevada County



### Vineyard Tour

**The Galuhn Vineyard in Chicago Park was one of the stops on this year's Tour of Nevada County Agriculture.**

Agriculture, sponsored by several community organizations, including NID.

This year's tour focused on the Chicago Park area and included stops at the Weiss Brothers propagation nursery, Galuhn vineyard, Vizino organic farm, Drew organic farm, Hermann gardens and wildlife habitat and Bierwagen

packing sheds.

The tour demonstrated the change that is taking place in local agriculture. NID is supplying fewer large farms and ranches and more smaller customers who are pursuing specialty agriculture.

Garth Veerkamp, farm adviser with the Nevada County

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# GENERAL MANAGER'S REPORT

## Retiring Manager Reflects on his Years With NID

By Jim Chatigny



It has been my privilege and pleasure to serve the customers of the Nevada Irrigation District for the past 23 years. I came to the district in 1979 and have served as your general manager since 1986.

During this time, I have known and worked with 15 elected members of the NID board. In helping carry out board policy, I have known and worked with more than 200 past and present district employees and countless citizens from throughout the communities we serve.

### Founders Would be Proud

Through the efforts of all these people, NID is a better, more effective public service organization than ever before. I am confident the community leaders who in 1921 founded the district would be proud that we have held true to their mission and realized many of their dreams.

During its 81-year history, the district has faced and overcome many challenges in improving operations and water systems and expanding its abilities to supply water to district customers.

In its early years, the district enlarged and built canal and reservoir systems that have allowed our region to become

one of the greenest and most productive in the Sierra foothills. These early water projects were not without controversy and great expense.

The district has also survived some tough financial times. We can look back to the days when NID couldn't afford to repair leaking canals, buy decent equipment or even cover employees' paychecks. At one point, district leaders were raising water rates 10 to 15 percent per year to put the district on solid financial footing.

Through recent years, the district has built a strong financial base, given its employees the tools to do a good job, preserved water rights for our region, improved water systems and customer service to our water users, and all the time keeping water rate increases at or below cost-of-living levels.

The district has responded to a changing community. We have worked to supply water

to areas of the district where it is needed. Today's water projects, however, are often questioned, delayed and made ever more expensive by those along our routes and waterways. It is always our goal to satisfy the concerns of all citizens involved but, unfortunately, this is not always possible. We must strive to provide the greatest public good with the least private injury.

Water quality and environmental issues continue to affect the district, its operations and costs. We consider ourselves to be good environmental stewards and we are very proud that the drinking water we supply to more than 17,000 homes, schools and businesses meets and exceeds state and federal public health standards.

### In Good Hands

When I retire in September, I will leave behind a dedicated and well-trained NID work force that will make my successor proud. Service to the district has been a most rewarding second career that I will always cherish as I do my 22 years of military service and participation in two wars against freedom.

I take immense pride in my service to the district and in the trust that members of the NID board have placed in me. In addition, I say thank you to all of the district's employees who have helped in having NID recognized as the best irrigation district in California.

# Farm

## Local Agriculture is Changing

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Dept. of Agriculture, said more people with non-farm backgrounds, including women, are getting into small farming.

Fewer people are making a living in Nevada County farming, said Veerkamp, who noted that 30 percent of local farmers also work off the farm or have other income. "We see a lot of farmers supporting the farm," he said.

### More Small Farms

NID Water Supt. Dennis Sanders has similar observations. He has seen more interest in small acreage farming, specialty crops and vegetable gardens. This interest is apparent at the local farmer's markets, he noted.

Vineyards continue to grow in popularity as do small equestrian operations, including show horse breeding, said Sanders. NID also supplies irrigation water to eight

### Growing Nursery Crops in Nevada County



**Dwight Weiss spoke to Ag Tour participants during a stop at the Weiss Brothers propagation nursery off Highway 174.**

golf courses, including the new Dark Horse course near Lake of the Pines.

These land uses are replacing the large cattle ranches of the past, said Sanders, who said the district is now down to about a half-dozen large cattle ranches.

### Top Ag Products

As these changes occur, agriculture remains a \$20 million per year industry in Nevada County, according to county statistics. Leading categories include timber, \$11.8 million; cattle, \$2.7

million; pasture/rangeland, \$1.7 million; wine grapes, \$1.2 million; fruit and vegetables \$0.5 million; and nursery stock, \$0.3 million.

NID supplies about 5,700 irrigation water users who use about 120,000 acre-feet of water per year. These numbers have held fairly steady in recent years.

Most growth in NID water service has been among customers who use treated drinking water. The district now supplies treated water to more than 17,000 homes, businesses, schools and other users.

## Update on the Lower Cascade Canal Study

**T**he Lower Cascade Canal Modernization Study is a project initiated by NID in 2001 to improve reliability and increase water quality and conveyance of the Lower Cascade Canal.

Currently, the capacity of the Lower Cascade Canal is not adequate to meet existing demand, nor will it meet anticipated future demand within NID's service area. Based on historical population growth and actual raw water sales, it is possible the canal will need to carry 95 cubic feet per second (cfs) within the next 30-40 years. Regardless of projected future demand, the canal is, under sum-

mer demand, already operating beyond its safe-rated capacity.

Phase I of the study, completed in December, confirmed the need for the project and defined one component as a pipeline with preliminary alternate routes on the south side of Banner Mountain.

### Phase II in Progress

The project is now well into Phase II and involves two components: the fate of the canal and the alignment of the new pipeline. NID is proposing to relinquish the canal at some point in the future. Current plans call for NID to assist a community-based project to maintain the canal's recreational

resources. Relinquishment would occur only after the pipeline is built and flows are reduced, starting sometime around 2006.

There are numerous opportunities for public involvement in the study process, including participation in the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) Working Group, Lower Cascade Advisory Committee, the NID Engineering Committee, and NID board meetings.

Please visit the project Web site at [www.lowercascadecanal.com](http://www.lowercascadecanal.com) or call NID at (530) 273-6185 for meeting dates, times and locations.

## District Complies With Mandate on Canal Water

NID no longer supplies canal water to customers for drinking or cooking purposes.

"This has been a long and difficult effort, but we are now in full compliance with state and federal public health regulations," said Water Operations Manager Terry Mayfield.

Use of canal water in homes has been a historic practice in some NID service areas but this kind of use is deemed unsafe by public health regulators.

In 1996, Congress amended the federal Safe Drinking Water Act and included a provision governing use of untreated water supplied through "constructed conveyances." Federal and state health regulators then relied upon water suppliers to enforce the regulations. Thrust into this regulatory role, NID surveyed more than 1,100 year-around irrigation water customers and eventually determined that 423 customers relied on canal water for drinking or cooking purposes.

### *421 District Customers Have Enrolled in a Bottled Water Distribution Program*

Over the past few years, district staff worked with customers to enroll 421 of the 423 in a state-approved bottled water distribution program that requires each participant to purchase at least 5 gallons of bottled water per month.

Mayfield said of the remaining two homes, one was vacant and the other appeared to be unoccupied. Water service to both was terminated in early June to meet the state's June 18 deadline.

"This is something we didn't ask for," said Mayfield. "When we're put into a regulatory role, it doesn't sit well with the Board of Directors, management or staff. This has been a difficult and expensive project and we want to thank all of our customers who have cooperated and worked with us."

Bottled water distribution is only a temporary solution, Mayfield said. The district now must help find ways to improve water quality for these customers on a more permanent basis, he said, noting that NID is working with elected officials on grant funding opportunities.

A quick fix is not expected. Many of the customers live in remote areas, far from piped treated water lines. The problem is compounded in areas where customers have been unable to drill adequate water wells.

## • NID NEWS BRIEFS •

**Recruitment in Progress.** NID is conducting a recruitment for a successor to General Manager Jim Chatigny, who retires Sept. 4. The recruitment attracted 62 applicants. NID directors planned to interview five top candidates and hoped to name the new general manager by August.

**37-Year Employee Retires.** Kenneth J. Casper, Jr., the district's senior employee, retired in June following a 37-year career with the district. Casper worked as a welder in the Maintenance Dept. He and his wife, Joan, live in Grass Valley.



**Ken Casper, Jr.**

**Better Water for LOP.** A \$6 million upgrade of the Lake of the Pines Water Treatment Plant is scheduled to begin this summer and take about a year. It is the largest project at the plant since its construction in the 1960s. The plant serves about 2,000 customers in Lake of the Pines and surrounding areas.

**Working with Grass Valley.** NID and the City of Grass Valley have embarked upon a study to determine if the city's water system should be transferred to NID for operation. Economy of service to city water users could be a benefit of the transfer. The study is being conducted by Sauers Engineering of Nevada City and is expected to be completed by this fall.

**More Parking at Demo Garden.** A new parking lot has been added near the UC Cooperative Nevada County Master Gardeners Demonstration Garden located at NID's Grass Valley office. The lot is for use by visitors to the garden and to NID offices.

### **Storage Good as Rain Year Ends**

As the 2001-02 precipitation year neared its end (June 30), NID water storage stood at 221,885 acre-feet, or 101 percent of normal for this time of year.

The rainfall season (as of June 27) produced 65.62 inches of precipitation at Bowman Reservoir (elev. 5,650 ft.), which equals 95 percent of average.

"Our water supply picture is good for this year and we expect good carryover storage for next year," said NID Operations Supervisor Sue Sindt.

"Our precipitation and runoff are slightly below average but we have been able to manage the runoff well and the district is currently about 38,000 acre-feet above the historical storage average."