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AN INTERVIEW WITH DIAN GRUENEICH

Making the Water-Energy Link



“The next update to the CPUC strategic plan should put specific emphasis on the water-energy nexus.”

Q: At the Carpe Diem convening you noted the need for better integrated water and energy planning at the California PUC and elsewhere. What would it take to get more focus on water at the CPUC?

DG: Several years ago the CPUC adopted for the first time a water action plan to guide its actions in the water area. We are now in the process of updating the plan, and this is an area in particular where I think we can put more emphasis on the linkage between water and energy issues, particularly leveraging our efforts for conservation. We expect to have this revision complete in the summer of this year, and it will guide our actions in coming years. In addition, in September 2008, the commission adopted the California Long-Term Energy Efficiency Strategic Plan, and that plan noted that one limitation of planning was that it did not address the water-energy nexus. Part of the problem was that there were other state agencies and groups heavily involved in these areas that we had not yet brought into our process. I think that in our next update to the strategic plan we should put specific emphasis on the water-energy nexus. Part of that will be obtaining better information than we now have about water usage in the state and about ways to save energy by addressing water usage and conservation.

Q: Everyone at the convening was struck by the opportunities to enhance water efficiency in California using the CPUC's home energy efficiency program. What would it take to better incorporate water into the program?

DG: This spring we are launching the nation's largest home energy-efficiency retrofit program. Our goal is to achieve on average at least 20% savings in residential energy usage. The program will include some water-efficiency measures such as low-flow shower heads. In addition, some local governments are using federal stimulus money to add enhanced features, particularly on water efficiency. One of the most exciting features is the increased use of innovative financing for these programs. The San Francisco program, GreenInvestSF, for example, ties financing to property taxes and allows inclusion of water conservation measures beyond those currently in the energy utility program. This is really exciting, and I'm hoping we can expand these efforts statewide.

Q: Do you think different standards for water efficiency are being applied to renewable energy sources than to traditional ones?

DG: Most of the new projects coming on line are renewable projects, while a lot of the traditional power plants were built 40 or 50 years ago when there was less concern for water efficiency. So it isn't that there is bias against renewable projects, it's the reality that because of our state policies, we are paying more attention to water usage and efficiency when we license power plants. We are going to have to have an appropriate balance between adding significant renewable energy sources while ensuring that we protect water supplies. We will need to push the envelope on the water efficiency of all new power plants, including renewables.

Q: Do you think there is something the Carpe Diem Project could do to make conservation a bigger part of the water-energy conversation?

DG: Carpe Diem has a very important role to play. It brings together key stakeholders who are involved in both the energy and water worlds, and it is helping us learn about the issues common to both of these areas. I think Carpe Diem is an excellent forum for convening important discussions on those issues.

Dian M. Grueneich is a nationally recognized expert in energy and environmental issues, with over 30 years of experience. She was appointed to the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger in January 2005 and unanimously confirmed by the State Senate for a six-year term. At the CPUC, she focuses on transmission planning and permitting, energy efficiency, climate change, renewable energy resources, and low-income consumer issues.

Prior to her appointment, Commissioner Grueneich served as a Board member of the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy and is a past-President of the California League of Conservation Voters. She is a graduate of Stanford University and holds a J.D. from Georgetown University. She is a Carpe Diem Project contributor.

The **Carpe Diem - Western Water & Climate Change Project** is a network of over 600 experts and decision makers dedicated to addressing the unprecedented challenge that the impacts of climate change on water resources pose for the western United States. The Project is housed at **Exloco**, a nonprofit organization with expertise in spotlighting critical issues and facilitating strategic thinking.

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