

Mountain Press



The Voice of the Mountains

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Inside This Issue

- Board honors Wright p. 2
- "Economics" returns p. 2
- Lady Chiefs victorious p. 6
- Books for newborns p. 8

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Celebrating Our 38th Year

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Sierra Resource Conservation District – Community Ground Water Program: Segment Two Graduate students from CSU Fresno share findings

Ten graduate students from Fresno State's Lyle's College of Engineering have been assisting the Sierra Resource Conservation District (SRCD) to obtain information for their Community Ground Water Program (CGWP) for four months. These students, whose areas of interest vary, studied water quality and quantity within the communities of Auberry and Prather, and have recently shared their findings.

Project manager Steve Haze notes, "It is quite remarkable how much in-depth analysis the students were able to perform in such a short period of time. Their professor, Dr. Li, should be thanked for the commitment and important service he gave to our foothill communities."

The CGWP was originally created due to a lack of information about community groundwater quality and quantity in Auberry and Prather. Recognizing the many unknowns about our water resource, the graduate students spent the semester studying it. Although many unknowns were revealed, and many more discovered, two items stood out.

First, according to their findings, in areas with a high concentration of pavement, no recharge of wells can occur. They calculated that in the Canyon Fork / Prather area, approximately 16.65 million gallons of rainfall is lost each year. Additionally, in the Auberry commercial area, it was estimated that nearly 6.9 million gallons was lost for recharging wells. Overall, the engineering students estimated that, within these two communities, nearly 39.25 million gallons of water, which could be used for recharging wells, flowed out of the area as storm water annually.

Secondly, contaminated groundwater and what are known as plumes are extremely difficult to clean up and cost millions of dollars. In particular, the Auberry General Store clean-up has been going on for more than 10 years. In fact, consumers pay into what is known

as a LUST (Leaking Underground Storage Tank) fund every time they purchase any amount of gasoline. The clean-up has, on occasion, had to stop because of lack of funds. Based on reports obtained by the engineering students, when the clean-up doesn't happen, the potential for contamination to spread can occur. There is at least one business that has had a filtration system installed due to groundwater contamination.

There are other items of interest in the study for those who depend on a reliable and clean supply of well water. The complete set of student presentations are available on the SRCD website at www.usjrwater-shed.org.

Local Auberry resident and SRCD vice president Gary Temple commented, "This program has been invaluable in helping residents gain important insight into

the potential impacts and current conditions of our groundwater. The fact of the matter is, you can't just stick your head in the sand, you have to do your homework and find out what's going on with our water resources in order to make proper land use decisions."

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