

Hiram Wadsworth fitting name for massive Hemet reservoir

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The recent historic agreement among California agencies dividing up Colorado River supplies should highlight the vision of Southern California's civic leaders more than 70 years ago.

In the mid-20s, public officials, business and community leaders banded together to craft a new regional partnership to bring the Colorado River to the coastal plain of Southern California. The Metropolitan Water District and the Colorado River have been indispensable factors in the growth and prosperity of Southern California in the second half of the 20th century. Today, the Colorado is still the backbone of Southern California's imported water supply, and it is likely to be so far into the future.

From the beginning, the Colorado River project was linked to the development of Boulder Dam. Neither project could have been completed without the other. While farmers in the Imperial Valley in the 1920s sought relief from floods on the Colorado, urban Southern California at first was interested primarily in the electricity a large dam could provide.

Then in 1923, in the middle of a great drought, William Mulholland and other leaders woke up to the possibility of developing a water supply from the Colorado. That fall, he went to the Colorado River to scout out possible routes.

Mulholland's idea, though, was to develop the water for Los Angeles alone, and indeed in June 1924 Los Angeles filed for water rights there. But this project was too big even for Los Angeles, and other Southland cities were clamoring for more water.

In July of that year, the Boulder Dam Association, a group of civic leaders from throughout Southern California that had formed to promote the development of the massive dam, came down squarely on the side of broader participation. Hiram W. Wadsworth, vice-president of the association, led the call for a regional partnership based on municipalities to bring the new water to Southern California.

The association adopted four principles for water development: 1) an agency similar to an irrigation district should be developed; 2) membership should be restricted to municipal corporations; 3) bonds should be used to finance the facilities; and 4) consumer distribution of the water supply should be reserved for the cities themselves. The association set up a separate committee for the formation of the water district, led by Wadsworth, the mayor of Pasadena.

That same month Wadsworth instructed Samuel B. Morris, head of the Pasadena Water Department, to call together a meeting of the representatives of Southern California cities for the Colorado River project. When representatives of 38 Southland cities met in Pasadena on Sept. 19, 1924, they elected Hiram Wadsworth chairman of the new Colorado River Aqueduct Association.

From 1924 to 1929 Wadsworth directed the campaign that led to the establishment of the Metropolitan Water District. He personally picked the executive committee that developed the

action plan and established the legal committee that drafted the MWD Act. Despite a legislative setback in 1925, Wadsworth led the campaign to secure authorization of the MWD Act in 1927. He solicited the involvement of cities in the new district and organized the election campaign in Nov. 1928 to establish it.

On Dec. 29, 1928 Hiram W. Wadsworth saw his dream come true when he hosted the luncheon that preceded the first meeting of the board of directors of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California at the Huntington Hotel in Pasadena.

For his accomplishments Hiram Wadsworth was heralded as the Father of the MWD. Pasadena awarded him the 1928 Arthur Noble Award for his "great achievement of bringing into being the Metropolitan Water District, thereby assuring badly needed water for Pasadena and other Southern California cities from the Colorado River."

When he died in 1939, the Los Angeles Times hailed Wadsworth's outstanding contributions and described him as "the Father of the project to bring water to Southern California areas from the Colorado."

Wadsworth's legacy, the cooperative regional approach to meeting water needs, has served Southern California well and is deserving of recognition.

This year, on Tuesday, Jan. 11, the Metropolitan Water District will select a name for its massive new reservoir near Hemet, its biggest project since the Colorado River Aqueduct. It is MWD's tradition to name such facilities after individuals who have contributed to the development of water resources in our region. There is no one more deserving of such an honor than Hiram W. Wadsworth.

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Postscript: MWD named the reservoir Diamond Valley Lake but honored founder Hiram Wadsworth by naming the massive power plant associated with the reservoir the Hiram Wadsworth Pumping Station.