

"The Communicator" is prepared by the District's volunteer Communications Committee to expand our ability to better inform the ratepayers. It covers a broad range of topics in greater depth. Your feedback on "The Communicator" or on any topic is always welcome—RMWD Communications Committee

RMWD District Engineer INTERVIEW - Kirsten Plonka

Rainbow Municipal Water District is a water "deliverer"; not a water producer. With an aging infrastructure and increased demand, the focus of the RMWD Management is on the efficient and effective maintenance of the current delivery and sewage system; while engineering solutions to accommodate a growing population. Recently Mike Daily, member of the RMWD Communications Committee, had the opportunity to interview Kirsten Plonka, RMWD District Engineer, to help ratepayers better understand the team that keeps the water flowing to Rainbow District customers 24/7.

MD: How old and what is the history of our infrastructure?

KP: RMWD was established in 1953 with the merger of several small water districts; Sumac Mutual Water Company, Bonsall Heights Water District, and Canonita Water Company, to name a few. Most of our water lines were "inherited" raw water agriculture irrigation lines (which is why some of them cut across parcels and groves). Many of the District's water lines were built in the 1940s and 50s, and the majority of the RMWD pump stations were built in the 1980s. Recent effort to maintain the aging infrastructure and comply with evolving regulations include covering 3 existing reservoirs (to comply with the California Department of Public Health), construction of a 6 million gallon water tank and taking Beck Reservoir offline for future rehabilitation.



Morro Inlet Pipe

MD: Describe the RMWD Infrastructure management process.

KP: Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) projects are prioritized by our staff in collaboration with the Engineering Committee, based on compliance and operational requirements. Funding is then assigned to the highest ranked projects from available budget; balancing the needs of rate payers and regulatory bodies.

MD: Describe briefly the RMWD Infrastructure support team/organization.

KP: Everyone at RMWD has a role in infrastructure support. The 6 Engineering staff work on designing and planning the infrastructure, while complying with regulations. Our 8 employees in Water Operations, 8 Construction team members, 5 Wastewater employees, and multiple other departments all work to ensure that clean water is always available in customers' homes. The 7-member Engineering Committee, made up of RMWD customers, reviews and makes recommendations on district infrastructure needs.

MD: Can you help us better understand the RMWD Delivery system. What are the critical components of our infrastructure? (tanks+pipes+pumps+reservoirs?) What makes up the RMWD "System"?

KP: All of RMWD water is treated by and purchased from the San Diego County Water Authority and Metropolitan Water District. We receive the water via aqueduct connections, known as turnouts. The RMWD system is comprised of transmission and distribution water pipelines, storage reservoirs and tanks, pump stations and pressure reducing stations. Because of the District's rural attributes of hills and valleys, RMWD has a lot of pipes in the ground with higher than normal water pressure. This leads to more stress on the pipes over time, contributing to large breaks. As with many water districts, age and deferred maintenance to parts of our infrastructure has left us with many facilities in need of repair and replacement.

MD: Regarding money requirements, how does the RMWD water district's funding look over the next 1-5 years with regard to funding infrastructure repairs and new infrastructure projects? Do we have the current and future flow of funds needed? How is our infrastructure repair and modernization impacted by our State Loans?

KP: On the water side of our business, the State Revolving Fund (SRF) loan will fund the Beck UV project. Due to ordinance 95-1, the District is unable to qualify for additional low interest loans. Therefore, RMWD will need to generate enough revenues through operation charges and new meter fees to meet the ongoing infrastructure replacement and expansion needs.



Lift Station 2

In regards to sewer, RMWD will be challenged in its efforts to fully fund the mandated system modifications connected to the CalTrans Hwy 76 expansion. In addition, our aging sewer outfall is in dire need of replacement. We are hopeful that operating revenues and new sewer connection fees will be adequate to meet the requirements; however, new connection fees will most likely not be received early enough to meet the payment requirements of CalTrans. RMWD may be left with a decision regarding borrowing or generating additional revenue through its charges to customers to meet the project requirements.

MD: What are your top priority repair projects for our existing infrastructure planned over the next 5 years? What absolutely/positively needs to be fixed? Which projects do you see as most critical and why?

KP: Sewer Lift Station #1 and the Sewer Outfall Pipeline are on the top of the priority to repair infrastructure that is in poor condition. If we have a sewer spill, the fines are enormous. For the past few years, sewer has been the focus of our CIP program and we are making good progress.

Part of that progress includes working with Caltrans to enlarge and relocate our sewer lines for the SR-76 last segment widening from Sweetgrass Road to Old HWY 395. Due to conflicts and undersized sewer pipes, RMWD must complete this Capital Improvement Program (CIP) project in conjunction with Caltrans. Construction is scheduled to start early in 2014.



Pala Mesa Reservoir

MD: How would a proposed consolidation with FPUD impact current and future RMWD infrastructure engineering projects? Will infrastructure work be affected or impacted by the JPA?

KP: Current and future RMWD infrastructure will benefit from the JPA. More resources will provide the CIP projects more staff to manage the projects. Small projects can be done in-house and large scale replacement projects can be jointly bid.

MD: Does our current infrastructure connect to/support any other adjoining districts? Mutual fire water exchanges with FPUD for example?

KP: Our District has interconnections with Oceanside and FPUD for emergency situations.

MD: How long have you been with RMWD? How long as the District Engineer?

KP: I have been with the District for 5 years. I started as an Associate Engineer and now have been the District Engineer for the last 9 months.

MD: What role does the volunteer Engineering Committee play in infrastructure questions and planning?

KP: They are involved in the CIP ranking process and are informed of all engineering projects from the preliminary stage to giving guidance to the Board for planning purposes. They do not have a role in day-to-day operations or project management.

MD: What role does the Board of Directors play in Infrastructure planning? Do they have any role in day-day engineering issues?

KP: The Board approves the CIP budget and CIP projects. They do not have any role in day-to-day engineering issues, however the Engineering Committee always has a Board representative.

MD: Describe the role of the emergency repair teams? How are they organized to respond? How are emergency calls handled?

KP: Typically calls come in from customers of water line leaks. Major leaks can be detected by our monitoring system. A crew member is assigned to respond, and they determine the scale of the break (gal/min), risk of property damage, customer impact, etc. A construction crew is sent to repair the failure.

Coordination with the San Diego County Water Authority (SDCWA) is required for continued success for large scale Water Authority shutdowns. For example, SDCWA had a 12-day shutdown in February. RMWD staff worked hard to set up temporary pumps and to configure the water system to ensure that customers still had water.

MD: The Rainbow Municipal Water district Communications Committee would like to thank Kirsten for the opportunity to interview her and her help in us better understand the challenges of water delivery in our region; and for the exceptional around-the-clock support provided by the district engineering and maintenance teams!