Rio Linda/Elverta Community Water District

Legacy of Dysfunction

Summary

Numerous citizen complaints about the Rio Linda/Elverta Community Water District (RLECWD or the District) have been brought to the attention of the Sacramento County Grand Jury. This grand jury found mismanagement of the District, its personnel, and finances. Dating back to 2007, the District failed to fulfill the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) compliance orders to provide adequate water supply and pressure. In the last year, CDPH issued two citations. A review of the financial documentation suggests the District may be in financial jeopardy, and leaves its continued financial viability in doubt. Ultimately, the direction and management of the District is the responsibility of the board of directors. The grand jury found grave concerns about the performance of the board of directors (the Old Board) that held office until December 2010. Whether the board that took office in December (the New Board) will be able to overcome the legacy of dysfunction and improve the District is uncertain.

Foreword

The Rio Linda/Elverta Community Water District (RLECWD) is an independent special district formed to deliver the essential and desirable public service of providing water to its geographic area. It is formed under and enabled by state law. It is governed by a five member board of directors whose members are elected by voters residing within the district. The District is a local government agency and is within Sacramento County. It is, therefore, subject to review by the Sacramento County Grand Jury.

Issues and Reasons for Investigation

One year after the 2009–2010 Sacramento County Grand Jury issued its report on the Rio Linda/Elverta Community Water District that stated it faces an “uncertain future,” that future is still in doubt. Most of the recommendations made in that report have not been implemented because the District’s board of directors has not taken the required actions.

The major issues for this year’s investigation are as follows:

- The continued mismanagement by the RLECWD Board of Directors
- The inability of a parade of general managers and interim general managers to manage the District’s operations
- The internal conflicts among staff, the general manager and the board of directors which interfere with the operation of the District
- The uncertain financial viability of the District.

Citizen complaints are still being received by the Sacramento County Grand Jury. Their main concerns are with the management’s inability to alleviate the volume and pressure inadequacies of the water system. Further concerns are with the mismanagement and contentious atmosphere exhibited by the District's board of directors, the general managers, and the field and office staff.

The grand jury will also comment on how the regulatory agencies, the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) and the Sacramento Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo), are trying to help the District overcome its problems.

Method of Investigation

The grand jury interviewed RLECWD ratepayers, past general managers, past and present board members, the District's legal counsel, financial auditors and former employees. The grand jury also met with representatives of CDPH and the Sacramento LAFCo, and subpoenaed and reviewed relevant documents from the District and other agencies. Grand jury members attended many District board meetings, LAFCo hearings and meetings of an adjacent water district.

Background and Facts

The Rio Linda Water District was formed in 1948 to provide water services to citizens in the unincorporated community of Rio Linda. In 1988, the water district annexed Elverta, and in 1998 changed its name to the Rio Linda/Elverta Community Water District. A new development was proposed under the Elverta Specific Plan and approved in 2007. If this development were to be completed, it has the potential to double the number of service connections.

The water supply is entirely groundwater. The nine active wells are connected to 16.2 miles of pipeline, much of which is over 50 years old. There are about 4,600 connections to the system, most being residential. The population of the area is almost 15,000. Unlike most other water districts in the county, in this District there are a substantial number of residents who rely on their own private wells. These non-ratepayers are allowed to vote for, as well as to serve on, the board of directors.

The area served by the District covers 17.8 square miles. Adjacent water suppliers include the Placer County Water Agency to the north, the City of Sacramento to the south, the Sacramento Suburban Water District (SSWD) to the southeast and the California American Water Company (CalAm) to the northeast. The Sacramento County Water Authority provides water in a nearby area. The District maintains an inter-connection with SSWD that can be opened in emergency situations.

In 2006, when two RLECWD wells were taken off-line for exceeding new federal arsenic standards, the District fell short of being able to supply adequate water for periods of peak demand. Since 2007, CDPH issued two compliance orders and two citations against the District. On November 19, 2007, CDPH filed a compliance order[i] against the District for "…inadequate source capacity and inadequate water pressure in its distribution system." This order imposed a moratorium on all new connections within the system. A second compliance order[ii], issued on December 28, 2009, incorporated the outstanding directives of the first order, cited two ensuing years of violations, specified that the District install three new wells, and set a timetable for compliance.

On May 6, 2010, CDPH issued a citation[iii] to the District. This citation required immediate reporting of several routine tests and the test results for about 500 backflow prevention devices in the district. In this citation CDPH also requested an analysis of the adequacy of the District's staff/operator levels for the water system and an updated Operations and Maintenance (O&M) Plan. On March 30, 2011, CDPH cited[iv] the District for not meeting the deadlines imposed in the previous citation. The District failed to meet deadlines for two important elements in the District's O & M Plan: schedules and procedures for flushing dead end mains and schedules and procedures for routine exercising of water main valves. This citation could result in fines of up to $100 per day per issue unless the District complies.

The District needs to construct three wells to satisfy CDPH compliance orders. The new wells will provide increased water supply and pressure to meet peak water demands and fire safety concerns. Drilling of the first well (#15) commenced in April 2011.

The District is eligible to obtain a $7.5M loan from the Safe Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (SRF), but only if it can show that it can afford to pay off the loan and to keep an amount in reserve to ensure loan repayment. In May 2009, the Old Board implemented a surcharge on all ratepayers. Based on the District's own financial records, which show several years of deficits, CDPH determined that the amount of the surcharge was inadequate to provide for loan repayment. CDPH stated that the District would need to collect an additional average of $5.46 per connection per month to secure the SRF loan. The Board commissioned a rate study as prescribed by Proposition 218. The rate study recommended an average rate increase of $8.90 per connection per month to adequately repay the loan and finance long delayed capital improvements.

The situation at the district remains in flux. After the required public hearing in March 2011, the Board agreed to a rate increase that is enough to satisfy the minimum requirements of the loan, but not enough to pay for capital improvements. Citizens are challenging the amount of the rate increase as well as the legality of the procedures used to establish the rate increase.

The Board of Directors

The grand jury found that many problems of the District, reported last year, have existed for many years and continue to exist. The Old Board failed to provide clear, short term and long term vision and directions, even in the face of compliance orders and citations. Not enough was done to correct the problems identified by CDPH and the 2009–2010 Sacramento County Grand Jury report. The problems and bickering that consumed the Old Board is a legacy that continues to interfere with the conduct of District business.

A successful board of directors provides direction and oversight by selection of a competent general manager, scrutiny of budget and expenditures, and establishment of policies. In contrast, the Old Board has not been successful in doing any of these things. In the last 12 months the District had multiple short term general managers. Also, the Board lacked a thorough understanding of its financial situation and did not follow its own policy manual.

The continual turnover in general managers documented in the previous grand jury report persisted in the past twelve months. In the last year, two general managers were fired: one an interim manager who was hired and fired by the Old Board, and the other a manager hired by the Old Board just after the November 2010 election and fired just six weeks later by the New Board. During the times when no general manager is on staff, the District's legal counsel assumed the duties of the general manager at an hourly rate of over $150. On April 18, the board hired a new general manager who will assume duties on June 1, 2011.

Under the District's Policy Manual, a general manager is to have "…full charge and control of administration, maintenance, operation, and construction of the water works system of the district." The short tenures of the various general managers created a host of problems that interfered with running the District. It was difficult for short term general managers to establish a rapport or working relationship with the employees. Most of the employees worked for the District for many years, had their own way of doing their jobs and were disinclined to take direction from a short term manager. The constant turnover allowed employees to run operations in the way they chose, a situation that opened the door to abuse and inefficiency. The lack of a working relationship hampered the effectiveness of the general manager in controlling the District's operations. In addition, the managers had little time during their short tenures to establish operational and financial systems to effectively manage the District.

Further, the Old Board failed to hire general managers who could handle the entire job as described in the policy manual. One interim general manager had water experience, but no experience in the financial aspects of running a water district. The general manager hired in November 2010, completely lacked experience in running any sort of water district or public agency, but did have experience in running a business. The District's legal counsel, who serves as interim general manager, has no experience in running a water district.

The attitudes of some board members towards the staff poison the relationship between general managers and the staff. Board members have said, in public, that the staff was overpaid and lazy. Protracted and unresolved labor negotiations with the Old Board produced an impasse that has persisted since July 2009. Initially, the Old Board had proposed eliminating full time positions and replacing them with part-time positions. The Old Board imposed a Last, Best and Final Offer (LBFO) that acts as the basis for reduced compensation and reductions in employee status. General managers testified that staff expected to be fired upon the beginning of a new general manager's tenure. Former general managers reported problems in communicating with staff that seemed hostile to, or at least wary of, the intentions of the managers. The New Board inherited this state of employee affairs.

The Old Board lacked adequate financial information and did not appropriately exercise fiscal oversight. Board members complained that they did not know where the District stood financially, and seemed unable to direct the general manager to correct the situation. Financial information was not kept current. Audits have regularly been late. Board members did not routinely receive a comparison of expenditures versus budgeted amounts, making it difficult for directors to understand the financial status of the District at any given time. No district can properly plan or make decisions if it lacks reliable financial information. Regardless of who is at fault for the lack of audits and financial data, it is a board's responsibility to find a way to get the information it needs. Hiring a competent general manager can help the board get that information.

The lack of valid financial information prevented the Old and New Boards from making sound, long and short-range financial decisions. For example, the Old Board exhibited difficulty in addressing the financial components of obtaining the State Revolving Fund loan. The Board's imposition of a surcharge insufficient to raise enough money to qualify was the result of a misunderstanding of the District's financial status. The Board finally commissioned a Proposition 218 rate study after the November 2010 election. The New Board struggled to determine the appropriate amount to raise rates.

The actions of the Old Board remain an impediment to the effective running of the District. The Old Board committed to two three-year contracts that contain severance clauses that entitled the general legal counsel and general manager to receive money if terminated before the end of the contract. The general manager's contract was made just after the November election, following LAFCo's recommendations against entering into long term contracts, and before the swearing in of the New Board. The Old Board hired a general manager after a cursory search and interview process. The person hired, as mentioned before, had no experience with operating a water district. The Old Board testified that these contracts were done in an attempt to show "stability" in the management of the District. In reality, the contracts set the District up for paying out large sums of money if it decides to terminate either of these individuals. With the firing of the general manager, the severance clause will be the subject of controversy and potential litigation. Either a payout or litigation over the severance clauses will drain finances from the already stressed District.

The Old Board failed to keep the public informed of its decisions. Under the Brown Act, decisions of elected boards must be made available to citizens. Most modern agencies rely heavily on their websites to provide information. RLECWD has a website. Unfortunately, the current website does not contain updated information. While meeting notices and the agendas appear within the Brown Act required time frames, minutes of the board meetings have not been updated for the six months prior to the writing of this report. The way the website is organized makes it difficult to even locate the minutes that are available. The history of the District and its work is contained in a section called "Resolutions and Ordinances." It contains detailed information of the past, but very little is posted after December 2008 leaving a curious citizen to wonder if any decisions were made. The "Labor Negotiations" page of the website said it is "under construction." If the District intends to use the website to provide information to citizens, it should keep that site current.

A large portion of the Old Board's dysfunctional legacy lies in the patterns of behavior among board members, staff, and even the general public. The relationships of the Old Board were marked with arguing, acrimony, and rudeness involving board members, staff and the public. Despite the District's policy manual providing a guide in conducting dignified and functional meetings, the New Board seems to follow the same old patterns. Board meetings were, and continue to be, conducted in a non-orderly and dysfunctional manner with spontaneous outbursts from the audience and Board members. Board members bicker among themselves in full view of the public, in a local newspaper, and in on-line blogs. Board bickering usually breaks down into arguments between the remaining Old Board members and some of the New Board members. Board meetings have unproductive agenda items such as cross censure motions filed by board members against other board members. The short relationship between the New Board and the six week general manager was less than cordial. A New Board member spends time in the District office trying to “micromanage,” much as former board members did. The New Board president is trying to change this behavior, but the pattern of years of such behavior makes this a difficult thing to accomplish.

It appears to this grand jury that the Old Board’s goal to keep rates low overshadowed their duty to operate the District in a sound manner. Both Old and New Board members are mired in controversy with each other and are unable to find consensus on how to do the District’s business. The board's legacy of dysfunction distracts it from accomplishing the mission of providing safe and adequate water to the ratepayers.

Staff

The District has generally employed a small staff of six to ten: three to four in the office and the remainder in the field. In 2005, the employees formed an employee association and later became affiliated with the Teamsters.

The Old Board had a desire to cut District costs to keep from raising rates. Their targets were employee salaries and benefits. They talked of hiring only part-time employees, and using volunteers or recruiting high school interns to perform typical staff duties. Members of this board published staff wages in printed flyers and in one member's newspaper. The board members believed that a small district such as theirs did not need to provide wages and benefits comparable to larger districts.

In 2006, the District signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the employee association. When the MOU's June 30, 2009 expiration date approached, negotiations began in earnest with the Teamsters who were representing the employees. The Board wanted to make cuts in wages and eliminate or severely restrict benefits; the employees wanted raises and continued benefits. Negotiations were protracted and costly for the District. No accord was reached and an impasse resulted. The Board imposed a “Last, Best, and Final Offer” (LBFO) effective July 1, 2009 through June 30, 2010. District employees are still working under this LBFO because no new contract has been agreed upon.

The LBFO eliminated two supervisory positions and created two new job titles to replace the eliminated supervisory titles. The LBFO states that the “District agrees to furnish Union with one (1) copy of each job description presently established and of such up-to-date job description as it may prepare in the future.” The District's current policy manual contains job descriptions for the old job titles, but job descriptions for the new titles have not been agreed upon. In addition to changing some job titles, the LBFO eliminated three steps in the salary schedule for all employees, thereby lowering staff wages by 15-20%.

The grand jury heard testimony that job performance decreased following imposition of the Last, Best, and Final Offer. There developed a pattern of behavior where the employees were reluctant to perform the duties they previously performed, in part claiming that the duties were not in their current job descriptions. The work environment became contentious. The imposed LBFO and disputed job descriptions caused disruption of normal staff operations, and damaged the working relationship between management and staff. When attempting to direct or discipline staff, general managers were often met with grievances filed by employees.

A critical example of mismanagement and lack of staff direction occurred when tasks were dropped after the imposition of the LBFO. The board adopted new job titles and a wage schedule without corresponding job descriptions. When the field supervisor job title was eliminated, confusion arose over who was responsible for reporting test results to the state. When directed by the general manager, employees responded in effect, “that is not my job.” As a consequence of this confusion, CDPH cited the District for not reporting test results. New job descriptions still have not been ratified.

Other instances of staff duties no longer being done have occurred. Testing of backflow prevention devices was not done for approximately two years. As a result, a general manager authorized a refund of about $30,000 charged for this testing. General managers hired additional staff and employed an engineering contractor to perform some of these duties, resulting in increased costs to the District.

Numerous witnesses testified that many confrontations with the staff occurred, specifically with the lead water utility operator. Confrontations ranged from an outright refusal to work to intimidating behavior on the employee’s part. To resolve issues of critical tasks being completed, the lead water utility operator’s rate of pay, but not benefits, was restored. The employee has resumed the testing and reporting required by CDPH.

Newly hired general managers have heard from staff members that they believed the general manager was hired specifically to fire staff. General managers in return reported being harassed by the staff, board members and the public. Several witnesses reported instances of yelling and disruptions in the office.

The frequent turnover of general managers has led to inconsistent application of policies. Staff often interpreted policies to their own best interest. For example, over several years employees received payment of vacation and sick leave in violation of District policy, whereas payout was only available on termination. Further, with managerial consent, vacation hours were accrued in excess of policy, an employee on workers compensation leave accrued vacation/sick leave hours, and a temporary employee accrued vacation/sick leave hours. In 2008, there were allegations that employees sold retired water meters and kept the cash. One employee was fired for this.

Another example of an employee taking advantage of the lax oversight by a general manager was the use of the District business credit card for personal expenses. The bookkeeper, over a period of time, charged thousands of dollars of personal expenses on this card. The bookkeeper claimed to have reimbursed the district for personal charges. Some of the charges were covered by applying points accumulated on the card. This bookkeeper was fired. The grand jury recommends that the Sacramento County District Attorney pursue the investigation of these credit charges.

Financial Concerns

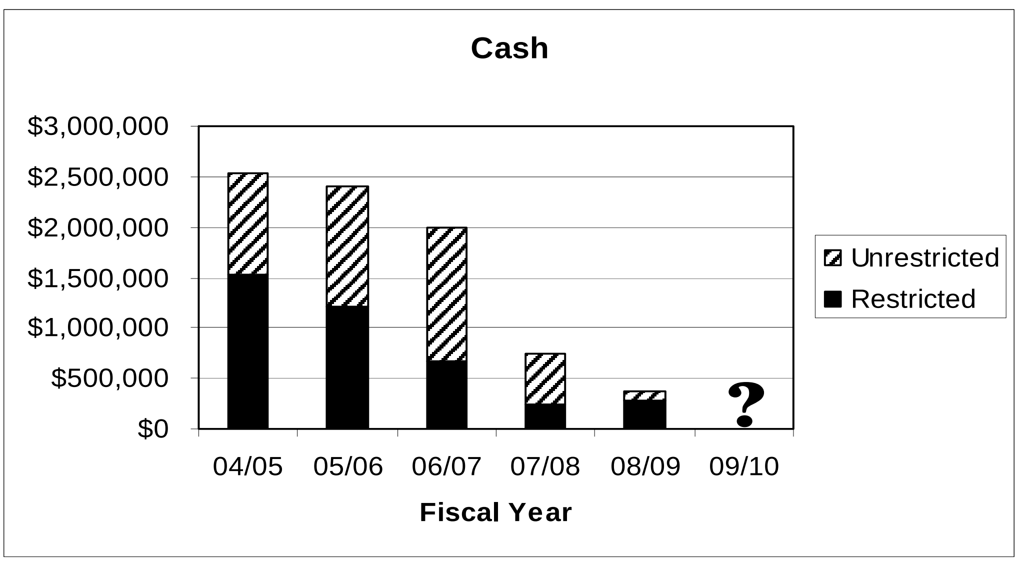
The financial status of RLECWD is unclear. What is clear is that the District has significantly reduced its cash and has not issued comprehensive financial reports since the 2007/08 fiscal year. Sound financial management has been hindered by a lack of adequate and timely financial information, by insufficient accounting policies and procedures, and by budget reports, when prepared, that are not updated sufficiently. Taken together, these deficiencies open the door for abuse. The District's financial viability is uncertain.

Reduced Cash

For financial reporting purposes, deposits held at various financial institutions or invested in the state investment pool are combined and reported as "cash and investments". For purposes of this grand jury report, "cash and investments" are collectively referred to as cash. The District designates its cash as either restricted or unrestricted. Unrestricted cash is used for current operations including payroll. The use of restricted cash is limited by legal requirements and/or board policy. Generally, cash is restricted for:

- bond debt service
- customer deposits
- capital projects
- long-term maintenance and improvements
- contractual obligations
- post employment benefits
- emergencies.

The following chart illustrates the decrease in restricted and unrestricted cash. This information was obtained from the District's financial statements.[v]



The District has been depleting both its restricted and unrestricted cash from a total of $2,537,000 in 2004/05 to $ 377,000 in 2008/09. Cash balances for 2009/10 have not been published as of this writing. The reduction in cash could be attributed to legal expenses, installation of system monitoring equipment and electronic meters, and drilling a well that is unsuitable as a drinking water source due to its high levels of arsenic (well #14). Testimony revealed that the District is not confident it knows where the cash actually went.

The District is struggling to manage its cash flow. The March 16, 2011 Accounts Payable Summary shows more than $150,000 in unpaid bills that are over 90 days past due. The legal counsel, acting as general manager, has been trying to negotiate payment terms with the creditors. Previous general managers testified of their efforts to negotiate payments on delinquent bills. Additionally, the grand jury heard testimony that water bills were sent out early in hopes that some customers would pay promptly and bring needed cash into the District.

Comprehensive Financial Statements & Audits

Public agencies generally have an annual audit of their financial statements. The time between the close of the fiscal year (June 30) and the issuance of an audit report for RLECWD has been increasing. An auditor testified they would expect audit reports to be completed by October. The following table illustrates the delays since 2006/07.

Fiscal Year	Audit Report Date	Time since end of fiscal year
2006/07	December 2007	6 months
2007/08	July 2009	13 months
2008/09	March 2010	9 months
2009/10	not started as of March 2011	greater than 9 months

Governmental accounting standards identify a Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR) as including an audit report, basic financial statements, management's analysis and discussion, and required supplementary information. The CAFR is designed to provide a more complete financial picture of an organization and is a governmental agency reporting standard. The last CAFR prepared by the District was for the 2006/07 fiscal year. While the financial statements for 2007/08 and 2008/09 were audited, the financial reports lacked the required supplemental information to be considered a CAFR. No CAFR has been prepared for the fiscal years 2007/08, 2008/09, and 2009/10.

These annual audit delays coupled with the absence of CAFRs are weaknesses that significantly hinder the Board and public from knowing the status of operations and where the District stands financially.

Financial Management and Oversight

The general manager functions as both the chief fiscal officer and the chief executive officer. Several general managers interviewed by the grand jury did not appear to have the training and skills necessary to perform the function of the chief financial officer. The Board must ensure that a properly qualified individual is selected to be general manager, and that individual fulfills the "Fiscal Officer" responsibilities described in the District's policy manual. Additionally, a competent bookkeeper knowledgeable in accounting principles is essential to the operation of the District.

A good accounting system provides management with sufficient financial information to make informed decisions. The grand jury heard testimony from several current and former board members about the lack of clear and comprehensive financial information. The grand jury reviewed a variety of financial documents dating back to 2001. Up until about 2008, the board regularly received financial packets that contained detailed expenditures, budget information, and comparisons of actual costs to budgeted costs. Since 2008, these financial reports to the board have been sporadic at best.

This lack of financial information prevents the Board from making informed decisions. For example, in early 2011, the Board considered increasing rates to cover the cost of needed capital improvements such as drilling new wells and improving existing infrastructure. A consultant prepared a draft of a Proposition 218 rate study using historic financial information and estimates. This historic information included audited costs through fiscal year 2007/08. Unfortunately, estimates were used for fiscal years 2008/09 and 2009/10 because actual information was not available. The board approved the full amount proposed in the rate study, however, only imposed a rate increase of about 70% of the proposed rate. While the higher rate would have provided much needed cash, the Board was reluctant to impose a higher rate without reliable financial information. The amount and legality of this increase is being challenged.

Budgets are a plan of operations that identify anticipated expenditures and sources of revenue to pay for those expenditures. Auditors expressed concerns that these budgets were not updated at least quarterly for operational changes. They were concerned that variances between budgeted and actual figures were not analyzed for errors, erroneous assumptions, or changes in business or economic factors. The lack of budget control may have allowed for substantial expenditures beyond current income and led to the subsequent reduction in cash reserves.

The District’s accounting policies, as described in its policy manual, are very limited. The District does not have a formal accounting procedures manual. The separation of duties needs to be clearly defined and documented to ensure accountability. Establishing adequate separation of duties to provide checks and balances is essential, even though it is a challenge for a small organization. Auditors reported that having an up to date accounting policies and procedures manual could provide for efficient training of new staff, more effective and timely financial reporting, and consistency within the administrative department.

The District has not established adequate procedures to ensure the timely recording of liabilities (unpaid bills). When invoices are received, they are given to the general manager for approval. They are not entered into the system until they are paid. When a new general manager was hired in November 2010, numerous unpaid bills totaling over $300,000 were found. Prior to finding these invoices, the Board was not aware of these outstanding liabilities. These invoices had not been recorded so they were not reflected in the accounting system. They were not tracked and no accounts payable aging schedule was prepared. An aging schedule, a list of unpaid bills, is very helpful in managing cash flow.

Financial System Weaknesses

The District has significant weaknesses in its financial management including:

- poor financial records

- no audit since 2008/09
- lack of accounting policies and procedures
- weaknesses in budgeting
- weaknesses in financial oversight
- high turnover of general managers.

Collectively, these weaknesses put the District at risk for fraud and abuse and several witnesses testified that they believe it has occurred. The District contacted an accounting firm to perform a forensic audit of bank statement records and transfers for the past six years. The District Attorney has been contacted and may proceed if any illegal activity is found.

Both the 2007/08 and 2008/09 audit reports stated that "…the District has expended the majority of its operating reserves and continues to run deficit budgets. These conditions raise substantial doubt about its ability to continue as a going concern." This means the auditors were concerned about the District's ability to pay its bills timely and maintain operations sufficiently to remain in business. In other words, the financial security of the District may be in jeopardy.

California Department of Public Health

CDPH monitors water providers for compliance with state and federal regulations concerning water quality and sufficiency. The department issued two compliance orders and two citations against the District. CDPH has been active in trying to help the District update its procedures and operations to bring it into compliance. It has defined specific actions the District must take including drilling three new wells at an estimated cost of $7.5M. The deadlines for compliance have been extended repeatedly because the District has not met any of the dates. Until the latest citation, CDPH has not fined the District, even though it has the authority to do so.

CDPH administers a loan program, the Safe Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (SRF), to help communities finance costly water system improvements. The SRF rates are very favorable, especially compared to private bank financing. Through a Notice of Acceptance of Application (NOAA), CDPH has reserved SRF funds for the District. This was done with the understanding that up to date financial reports will verify the District's financial viability. The NOAA can be withdrawn if the above conditions are not satisfied. The District needs to demonstrate that it can repay the loan while still maintaining operations, including long and short-term maintenance. Even though the District instituted a surcharge ($19 per connection per billing period) in 2008, CDPH required an additional rate increase to ensure repayment of the loan. The water district completed a rate study and approved a rate hike that is scheduled to begin in May 2011.

CDPH staff has spent many hours discussing the District's needs and future plans with several contractors, as well as a parade of general managers and board members. The state agency routinely bills water districts for this type of assistance. RLECWD has paid thousands of dollars for this service, and several of the CDPH invoices remain unpaid. Board members seemed to be surprised that they were billed for these meetings, emails, and phone conversations even though they have signed checks to pay these invoices in prior years.

Many questions have been raised about RLECWD's ability to provide adequate and safe water to its customers. While CDPH is concerned about the District's lagging progress, it continues to support the District in its efforts to remain an independent water district. That department believes the District's slow process would still be preferable to take over of the District by another entity. The one tool the department could use to take over district operations is receivership authorized by the court system. CDPH says the standards for receivership are extremely high because a district has to be "unable or unwilling to adequately serve their users" or is "unresponsive to the rules or orders of the department." Under receivership the operator is usually replaced, but not the board of directors. CDPH feels the District has been trying, but the question still remains, are they able to maintain operations responsibly?

Local Agency Formation Commission

A Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) is required in each California county. It governs formation, consolidation and reorganization of special districts. In May 2010, the Sacramento County Grand Jury recommended that LAFCo "should immediately initiate a reorganization proceeding which includes completion of a Municipal Service Review (MSR), and a study of feasibility and alternatives for reorganization of RLECWD." LAFCO began the MSR process soon thereafter.

Much of the responsibility for assembling data for an MSR lies with the special district being examined. At the November commission meeting (one day after the November 2010 election), LAFCo staff confirmed that they still did not have an approved MSR. The LAFCo Commission recommended that RLECWD:

- move quickly to hire a qualified general manager
- immediately initiate the Proposition 218 process for rate adjustments
- provide missing information to LAFCo for the MSR
- not enter into any new contracts that would obligate the incoming Board.

At the November LAFCo meeting, the commissioners directed its staff to immediately explore consolidation options rather than wait for completion of the MSR. LAFCo initially identified three potential consolidation candidates: the Sacramento County Water Agency (CWA), Sacramento Suburban Water District (SSWD) and California American Water Company (CalAm). LAFCo staff contacted CWA and SSWD to determine their interest in consolidating with RLECWD. LAFCo staff found it difficult to convince either agency to consider consolidation with the District. A comprehensive analysis would be necessary to sort out the uncertain condition of the infrastructure, finances and outstanding obligations at the District. SSWD estimated an adequate study would cost at least $40,000. LAFCo cannot fund this study.

SSWD indicated a qualified interest in consolidation with RLECWD. However, it would need outside funding for the necessary comprehensive study. SSWD wants to protect their ratepayers from assuming liabilities and costs that might come from consolidation.

Having been formed by a merger, SSWD has experience with consolidation. One of the districts merged into SSWD, Northridge, had a failed joint project with RLECWD.

The Sacramento County Water Agency indicated they were unable to even consider consolidation during this period of severe budget restrictions. The CWA operates water systems in several non-contiguous areas of the county. The board that guides these operations is composed of members of the county board of supervisors. While the chances for this reorganization seem remote, it presents an interesting potential solution.

LAFCo dismissed the idea of approaching CalAm to assess their interest in taking on RLECWD, saying they preferred to keep the District in public operation rather than having it turned over to a private company. CalAm, however, has written to the RLECWD Board to indicate their interest in buying the District. Because water rates are such an issue in Rio Linda, the grand jury believes that ratepayers would not readily consider this option.

LAFCo strongly suggested that the Board consider entering voluntary receivership, or seeking management and operational oversight from other water districts. The New Board has accepted the assistance of outside agencies and individuals to help complete initial interviews and evaluations to fill the vacant general manager position. LAFCo has encouraged other regional water agencies to assist RLECWD by providing peer review and evaluation of the District's operations and management. The Board will discuss this opportunity after a new general manager is in place.

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[i] Compliance Order 01-09-07-CO-004

[ii] Compliance Order 01-09-09-CO-004

[iii] Citation No. 01-09-10-CIT-003

[iv] Citation No. 01-09-11-CIT-001

[v] District's cash balance extracted from financial statements.

	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Unrestricted	$1,001,940	$1,191,744	$1,309,482	$488,276	$90,235	Not Available
Restricted	1,535,086	1,210,026	676,239	248,608	287,207	Not Available
Totals	$2,537,026	$2,401,770	$1,985,721	$736,884	$377,442	Not Available

Findings and Recommendations

Finding 1.0 The Board of Directors lacks vision and does not exercise appropriate oversight of the District.

> **Recommendation 1.1** The Board of Directors should undergo formalized management training.
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> **Recommendation 1.2** The Board of Directors should coordinate with LAFCo to seek peer reviews by other water agencies.
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> **Recommendation 1.3** The Board of Directors should work with the general manager to assure that the District policy manual is complete and up to date.

Finding 2.0 Decisions of the Board of Directors are not adequately documented.

> **Recommendation 2.1** Minutes of the board meetings should be finalized in a timely fashion. At a minimum, minutes should be available for approval at the next scheduled board meeting.
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> **Recommendations 2.2** Minutes and resolutions should be posted on the District's website in a timely fashion.

Finding 3.0 The Board has repeatedly failed to hire and retain a qualified general manager.

> **Recommendation 3.1** The Board should create a supportive climate within the District so that the general manager can function effectively.

Finding 4.0 Protracted labor negotiations and disputed job descriptions cause disruption of normal staff operations and damage the working relationship between management and staff.

> **Recommendation 4.1** The District should conduct a survey of water districts to determine appropriate staffing requirements and fair wages and benefits for comparable work.
>
> **Recommendation 4.2** The District must resolve the long-standing labor dispute and ensure all parties understand the agreement.
>
> **Recommendation 4.3** The general manager should establish and update job duties, qualifications, and titles.
>
> **Recommendation 4.4** The District should implement and enforce a policy of annual performance reviews of all employees.

Finding 5.0 The general work environment at the District is contentious and unpleasant. Staff members have not always worked in the best interest of the District. Trust and respect among staff, management, and Board of Directors is lacking.

> **Recommendation 5.1 The** Board, general manager and staff should make it a priority to restore mutual respect, trust and confidence.
>
> **Recommendation 5.2 The** Board must refrain from interfering with the authority of the general manager. The Board must refrain from micro-managing.

Finding 6.0 The financial status of the District is unclear.

> **Recommendation 6.1** The District should hire and retain an experienced qualified bookkeeper.

> **Recommendation 6.2** The District should update all accounting records and complete the audit for 2009/2010.

Finding 7.0 The Board is not receiving up to date financial information that will permit informed decisions.

> **Recommendation 7.1** The District should prepare realistic budgets and update them at least quarterly.

> **Recommendation 7.2** The District should provide monthly comparisons of actual expenses and income to budget projections.

> **Recommendation 7.3** The District should monitor accounts payable by preparing aging schedules.

> **Recommendation 7.4** The District should resume the preparation of Comprehensive Annual Financial Reports (CAFRs).

Finding 8.0 The District does not have an accounting policies and procedures manual.

> **Recommendation 8.1** The District should prepare and follow a comprehensive manual. The manual should be kept current.

Finding 9.0 Oversight of the district's finances was so lax that the door was open for fraud and abuse.

> **Recommendation 9.1** The district should conduct a forensic audit of its bank records.

> **Recommendation 9.2** The District Attorney should investigate the personal use of the district's business credit card.

Finding 10.0 Both CDPH and LAFCo are actively trying to help RLECWD solve its problems and properly serve the ratepayers.

> **Recommendation 10.1 CDPH** and LAFCo should continue to use their combined influence and authority to assist the RLECWD to become a financially sound and capable provider of safe and adequate water.

> **Recommendation 10.2 CDPH** should continue to aggressively monitor and enforce compliance of RLECWD with water quality and quantity standards.

Finding 11.0 The District is clearly operating in a substandard manner that impedes success in attaining the stated mission of "…supplying water to existing and future customers in a cost effective manner while operating the District in a financially sound manner."

> **Recommendation 11.1** If District operations do not show substantial signs of improvement by December 31, 2011, the Board should institute voluntary receivership proceedings, undertake to reorganize into a neighboring water district, or allow itself to be sold.

Recommendation 11.2 Both CDPH and LAFCo must use their influence and authority to assist the District and force reorganization or receivership, if the District does not show substantial signs of improvement by December 31, 2011.

Response Requirements

Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05 require that specific responses to indicated findings and recommendations contained in this report be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Sacramento County Superior Court by August 14, 2011, from:

- **The Rio Linda/Elverta Community Water District (Findings 1.0 thru 9.0 and 11.0)**
- **Sacramento County Local Agency Formation Commission (Findings 10.0 and 11.0)**
- **The Sacramento County District Attorney (Finding 9.0)**

The Grand Jury requests the following entities respond to this report:

- **California Department of Public Health (Findings 10.0 and 11.0)**

Mail or hand-deliver a hard copy of the response to:

Hon. Steve White, Presiding Judge
Sacramento County Superior Court
720 9th Street, Dept. 47
Sacramento, CA 95814

In addition, email the response to Rebecca Castaneda, Grand Jury Coordinator, at castanb@saccourt.com