

# Opinion: A lesson about California's water systems

By Gary Arant

As people focus their attention on water supply issues and rates, I often hear this question: "Why are there so many water agencies?" As with the issue of "we conserve and you raise rates," this is a complex issue involving a little geography and history.

Most of the state's water occurs naturally in northern California. In the mid-1800s, this abundance led communities in Northern and Central California to build local storage and irrigation systems. Meanwhile, the sleepy villages of Los Angeles and San Diego existed off of local intermittent stream flows and groundwater.

Completion of the Union and Southern Pacific Railroads in 1860s made the West Coast accessible to the rest of the nation. Land speculators used Southern California's greatest resource, its climate, to promote the sale of vast tracts of undeveloped land.

As a result, Los Angeles' population grew rapidly. In 1908, city fathers authorized the construction of the Owens Valley system to bring water from the eastern slopes of the Sierra Nevada 233 miles south to L.A.

No sooner had the Owens system been completed in 1913, there was concern that even more imported water would be needed. In 1928, 13 cities formed the Metropolitan Water District to build a 242-mile long aqueduct system to import water from the Colorado River.

As the nation mounted World War II's Pacific campaign, San Diego County, with its military bases and aircraft industry,

was thrust into a critical war role. As a result, from 1940-43 the county's population doubled to more than 400,000 people.

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