

Let's Talk Water – Nevada Water Resources Association

By Dr. Mike Strobel

I hope everyone is enjoying the holidays. I am visiting in the Midwest and we are having a truly white Christmas (winter storm warning with 10-15 inches of snow). Because of the holiday season, I decided to skip a discussion about technical science or natural disasters (such as floods, volcanoes, and earthquakes) and instead talk about something of a lighter nature.

Many people have asked me where to obtain information about courses and workshops on water topics. There are a number of organizations that offer such activities, but usually these activities are held in other parts of the country. Nevada is fortunate to have a local organization that offers conferences, workshops, seminars, and various publications on water. This organization is the Nevada Water Resources Association (NWRA).

NWRA is a non-profit, issue-neutral organization that is made up of a wide variety of water professionals, students, and non-scientists with an interest in water from across the State. What I mean by issue-neutral is that the group does not advocate any political or management position, but rather tries to provide information on the basic principles of water science, water law and policy, and water management, with a focus on Nevada.

As pointed out on their webpage, the mission of NWRA is to expand awareness of water issues throughout Nevada. Their purpose is to provide education, training, and networking (interaction between individuals) opportunities for people interested in understanding, developing, conserving and protecting Nevada's water resources.

The group has a long history in Nevada, although the name has changed a bit over the years. Beginning as a group of Federal agencies called together by the State Engineer back in 1944 to discuss water issues, the group continued to meet annually to discuss working relationships and coordination. In 1951, the group became the Nevada Reclamation Association, and was affiliated with the National Reclamation Association. The group changed its name to the Nevada Water Resources Association in 1971. Today, NWRA consists of a wide variety of agencies, associations, and individuals with water interests and is independent of any ties to national organizations.

The organizational structure of NWRA consists of an executive director, the State Engineer, and 16 elected members of the Board of Trustees. These elected members represent 4 districts across Nevada, with 4 trustees for each district. The districts consist of District 1 (Clark, Lincoln, Nye, and Esmeralda Counties), District 2 (Mineral, Lyon, Douglas, Carson City, Storey, and Churchill Counties), District 3 (Lander, Eureka, Elko, and White Pine Counties) and District 4 (Humboldt, Pershing, and Washoe Counties).

Membership in NWRA is open to anyone with an interest in water issues. Presently, there are over 200 members and the roster has been growing each year. What started out as a group of Federal and State scientists, engineers, and water managers has grown into a

diverse group, including lawyers, community planners, ranchers and farmers, politicians, environmentalists, developers, students, and many others with various interests. This mix of people brings together a broad range of viewpoints.

The major event for NWRA is the annual conference, which alternates every year between being held either in northern Nevada or southern Nevada (last year, held in Mesquite and this year in Reno). This is a 2-3 day conference that consists of technical presentations, discussion panels on current and on-going issues, workshops on educational topics, and general-interest talks. The conference also hosts student presentations and activities, information booths from various companies, the NWRA election of new board members, and many opportunities for interaction and networking.

This year's annual conference will be held February 1-3 in Reno. The theme of the conference is "Growth, Water and the Quality of Life in Nevada," which is a very important concern in the minds of many of us in Nevada.

NWRA hosts a number of other symposiums and workshops throughout the year. For example, NWRA has recently offered workshops on water law and policy, arsenic contamination and remediation, surface-water modeling, ground-water basics, Lake Mead issues, Lake Tahoe issues, the hydrology of northeastern Nevada and the Ruby Mountains, and many other issues. NWRA offers seminars on many water topics, such as well construction, surface water methods and analysis, and basic hydrology. Education for the general public and advanced training for water professionals is a main function for the organization.

The Journal of the Nevada Water Resources Association is a science publication that comes out twice a year (Spring and Fall) and offers articles on various technical subjects for water professionals. The journal is entirely on-line (available to everyone on the internet) and provides an outlet for publishing research focused on Nevada issues. This spring, the journal will concentrate on articles concerning Lake Tahoe.

NWRA also offers other publications for sale on their website. This is a good place to obtain materials of general and specific interest. For example, there are books on water law and water rights, which are topics many people have asked me about.

If you want more information about NWRA, you can contact Donna Bloom, Executive Director at P.O. Box 8084, Reno, NV 89507 (775-626-6389) or check out the website at www.nvwra.org.

Okay, my government disclaimer: I am writing about the NWRA as a public service and to identify a source of water information in Nevada. The USGS does not officially endorse or advocate membership in this or any other organization. Views expressed at NWRA functions and in their publications do not necessarily represent those of the USGS.

As the snow continues to pile up outside my window, I hope that next week I will be back in Nevada and will write about USGS activities. We will be busy in eastern Nevada in the coming years and people should understand more about our agency. If you have any questions about water topics, please contact me in care of the Ely Times or email me at mstrobels@usgs.gov.