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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Auburn - Directors of the Placer County Water Agency are continuing to explore ways that it's existing Zone 1 surface water delivery infrastructure capacity can be stretched until the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation can complete the American River Pump Station project.

The agency and Reclamation have been planning the American River pump station for the past eight years. Reclamation expects to start construction on the \$31 million project this year and to have it operational by the summer of 2005.

Meanwhile, the agency has stepped up efforts to operate its canal systems more efficiently by allowing large water users to purchase more water when they need it and less when they don't. Staff will be working with large commercial irrigation water customers who purchase 20 or more miner's inches to cut back on early and late season water deliveries to farms, ranches and golf courses in return for savings on their water bills.

The PCWA Board of Directors on Thursday (Jan. 2) also authorized staff to develop two additional measures to increase the efficiency of the canal delivery system.

These are 1) limiting new Zone 1 irrigation customers to a maximum of one-half miner's inch of water until the pump project is completed, and 2) changing the current definition of year-around and seasonal irrigation water service to allow customers to purchase winter water separately from their summer, irrigation season needs.

Further review of the changes is expected in coming weeks.

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In other business, directors:

- approved a 3.25 percent 2003 wage increase for agency employees. The adjustment is part of a three-year contract that includes retirement plan improvements in the second year and step raises for all salary ranges in 2005.

- voted their continued support of a \$554,500 CALFED grant that would be managed by Sierra College and used for sedimentation studies on the American River. Directors said they were puzzled by the Placer County Resource Conservation District's rejection of the grant in September and its recent move to have it rewritten. The board asked the RCD to reconsider the matter at its next meeting.

- held a strategic planning workshop with meeting facilitator Steve Barber. The session was one of a series of meetings in which the board is identifying and prioritizing the many issues facing the water agency. Further workshops were scheduled for Jan. 22 and Jan. 28.

The next regular meeting of the PCWA Board of Directors will be held at 3 p.m. on Thursday, Jan. 16, in the Placer County Board of Supervisors chambers, 175 Fulweiler Avenue, in Auburn. PCWA board meetings are open to the public.