

## MWDOC A Year in Review

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Here is an undeniable fact: this year has been hard. The COVID-19 pandemic has been swift and savage, bringing with it excessive challenges that no one could have possibly prepared for. From economic impacts and devastating personal losses, to transformative moments in policy and human history, 2020 has changed the way we live, work, play, and connect with one another. And if we take a closer look, despite the incredible challenges, this year has also been one of necessary transformation, personal and professional introspection, discovery, planning, and growth.

Over the past year, Municipal Water District of Orange County (MWDOC or District) staff has incorporated into each day the spirit of appreciation that some typically reserve for the holiday season. We are thankful for secure jobs and the support of each other, especially as we strive to overcome obstacles created by the pandemic. Together, we have worked alongside our board, our member agencies, industry, environmental and education partners, contractors, policy makers, and others to reimagine the way we do business, *creating a new landscape* to build upon. While we're anxious to turn the calendar page, we'd like to wrap up this difficult year by switching focus and celebrating a few of our achievements in 2020. Here a just a handful of accomplishments from our collective MWDOC team:

### **Finance and Information Technology (IT)**

The District's successful pivot to a virtual working environment couldn't have been possible without the MWDOC Finance and IT Department. This team managed expectations, benefits, and logistics, ensuring that all 40+ employees and seven board members were prepared and equipped to immediately migrate from a traditional office setting to a remote work life. In addition to this monumental responsibility, the department transitioned to a new, more efficient financial software, began training and integrating a new Accountant, and celebrated two (2) 10-year work anniversaries for department staff.

### **Engineering**

The MWDOC Engineering Department has been hard at work studying, analyzing, and proposing solutions for office building improvements that address critical seismic issues while still allowing for continued operations, and that meets new social distancing requirements. Additionally, this team has been working with consultant Black & Veatch on the completion of a hydraulic model of the Orange County regional water distribution system. The model's framework is now complete, and calibration testing is currently underway. The model will help with potential planning scenarios including identifying if improvements to the existing infrastructure are needed, managing new system operations and hydraulics, and supporting management of water quality.

### **Administration**

The MWDOC Administration Department ensures that all MWDOC staff and board have the key foundational support and administrative guidance they need to successfully accomplish their work,



whether in pre-pandemic conditions, or remotely during times of crisis. This year, not only did this team meet all lawful obligations and successfully transition board and public meetings to a virtual environment, but also coordinated in-person and remote MWDOC board director activities including vacancies, elections, and required trainings. Additionally, the department transitioned recruitment efforts to a virtual process, revised the Administrative Code and Biennial Conflict of Interest Code, and implemented new flexible savings and health savings accounts, as well as new COBRA administrators - all to ensure clarity and consistency, and to improve efficiencies and cost savings.

### **Water Emergency Response Organization of Orange County (WEROC)**

If 2020 has taught us anything it is that disasters don't wait until we're prepared for them, and California has been hit with one blow on top of the other. From COVID-19 and power shut-offs, to wildland fires like the Silverado and Blue Ridge fires, WEROC continues to coordinate emergency planning, response, and recovery for 37 Orange County water and wastewater agencies in cooperation with the County, State, and southern California utilities. In addition to leading bi-weekly conference calls, this team has been hard at work establishing guidelines, procedures, communications, and resource sharing between partners and participating agencies to manage the barrage of events that have rocked 2020. Furthermore, the WEROC team was able to spearhead the Orange County Regional Water and Wastewater Multijurisdictional Hazard Mitigation plan, develop a Strategic Assessment Report, coordinate with member agencies to ensure compliance with America's Water Infrastructure Act, and develop a comprehensive 5-year training and exercise plan to ensure that water and wastewater agencies are ready for the next disaster.

### **Government Affairs**

It has been a long year, especially for government affairs and politics. 2020 has been unlike any other year for both Congress and the State Legislature, and MWDOC Government Affairs has had to remain alert and agile, navigating these critical issues in an atmosphere of uncertainty. This year, MWDOC Government Affairs continued to actively advocate for full funding of key water programs in Washington D.C., as well as at the state and local levels. Some of those issues included: PFAS education; coronavirus relief funding for special districts; emergency wildfire and backup generator legislation; funding authorization for desalination projects, and more. Additionally, MWDOC's Grant Funding and Acquisition Program, Water Advisory Committee of Orange County – in partnership with Orange County Water District- and Independent Special Districts of Orange County (ISDOC) activities and programing continue to be successful even in a challenging virtual environment, with ISDOC being awarded the 2020 "Chapter of the Year" by the California Special Districts Association.

### **Metropolitan Issues**

MWDOC is Metropolitan Water District of Southern California's (Metropolitan) third largest member agency, holding key positions on the board of directors that oversee finance, policy development, strategy, and implementation. The department that provides detailed analysis and technical support to the MWDOC-Metropolitan delegation, and ensures that MWDOC member agencies are kept up-to-date on Metropolitan issues and plans of action, is the same department that just this year helped secure incentive funding for nearly 23,000 acre feet of water produced by Metropolitan's Local Resource Projects (LRP) program. Additionally, this team implemented a cost sharing agreement with 22 Orange County agencies that will provide consistency and coordination for the preparation of Urban Water



Management Plans over the next 25 years, and coordinated Cyclic and in-lieu storage deliveries to the Orange County Groundwater Basin of more than 8,500 thousands of acre-feet.

### **Public Affairs**

In the midst of a global crisis, where clear, concise, transparent communication is necessary and personal connection is harder to come by, the MWDOC Public Affairs (PA) Department has thoughtfully virtualized every public interaction, event, partnership, and program to meet the needs of an extraordinary new reality. In immediate response to COVID-19, MWDOC PA created a virtual portal for California utilities to share information, produced a public service announcement, and prepared a communications toolkit that was shared with over 200 water utilities throughout the state. Additionally, MWDOC K-12 Choice School Programs were reengineered to ensure high levels of engagement and learning, incorporating pre- and post-school visit activities to cement lesson plans—something that proved challenging in the early stages of the pandemic. Also this year, MWDOC assumed leadership of the Water Energy Education Alliance (WEEA), a collaboration of water, energy, and education professionals working together to strengthen career pathways for southern California high school students. And to top it off, MWDOC PA was recognized with four (4) awards in 2020, including the distinguished Bronze Anvil from the Public Relations Society of America, two (2) EPICs from the California Association of Public Information Officials (CAPIO), as well as the coveted CAPIO Communicator of the Year Award presented to PA Manager, Tiffany Baca.

### **Water Use Efficiency**

While we've come to expect the unexpected from 2020, don't expect grass to grow under the feet of MWDOC's Water Use Efficiency (WUE) Department. This year, this team of water-saving experts procured new grant funding totaling 3.6 million dollars, and was recognized with an Environmental Protection Agency WaterSense award. Additionally, MWDOC had over 500K square-feet (sq. ft.) of non-essential turf replaced with California Friendly landscaping, provided rebates on nearly 2,500 water-saving devices, and had more than 130K sq. ft. of drip irrigation replaced with over 100 participants taking advantage of the MWDOC Landscape Design and Maintenance programs. MWDOC WUE also hosted two series of Qualified Water Efficient Landscaper certification classes, providing instruction on local Orange County water supply, sustainable landscaping, soil types, irrigation systems and maintenance, as well as irrigation controller scheduling and programming. Furthermore, the WUE Water Loss Control group surveyed nearly 700 miles of distribution system for 11 retail agencies, finding nearly 350 leaks, saving Orange County 19.5 million gallons of water each year.

### **MWDOC Staff and Board**

In a year where loss somehow became routine, MWDOC has been fortunate to keep all of our staff members employed. Additionally, we've added valuable members to our small but mighty group, including Vicki Osborn, Director of Emergency Management, whose timely entrance has proven invaluable in the year of uncertainty; Judy Roberts, Accountant, whose exceptional skills ensure that despite the continued chaos, everyone and everything will be counted; Alex Heide, Water Resources Analyst, who brings a wealth of water policy, water management, and political knowledge to his new position; Katie Vincent, Education Programs Assistant, a critical support for WEEA and the future of southern California water and energy career pathways; and, Andrea Antony-Morr WUE Analyst II, whose skill and passion for water has helped MWDOC's water saving efforts continue to flourish. Also, on



December 4, 2020, MWDOC will swear in two (2) new MWDOC board members—Karl Seckel, a 40+ year water veteran and former MWDOC assistant general manager and district engineer, as well as Al Nederhood, former Yorba Linda Water District board member, and president of KidWorks, a non-profit in Santa Ana.

This year, we also said farewell to two (2) of our MWDOC-Metropolitan board delegates—Brett Barbre and Larry McKenney. Both are exceptional and outspoken individuals who left a great impression on Metropolitan policy discussions. And finally, MWDOC President Sat Tamaribuchi has joined the Metropolitan board, and the District looks forward to welcoming a fourth delegate representing MWDOC in the New Year.

Every year has a few defining moments, and 2020 has certainly had more than its fair share. MWDOC will continue to meet the challenges ahead no matter what they may be offering advocacy, support, and education on critical water issues that affect the region. We will continue to research, analyze, and implement best practices for our specialties and programs, providing innovation and value, and evolving with the new normal. We stand firm in our commitments to our member agencies, employees, and our Orange County residents, businesses, students, teachers, and partners. 2020 has illuminated the importance of resiliency and community, and while this year we have been forced apart, in many ways, we have also been brought closer together.