

# Seeking solutions to San Diego's water supply issues

By LOIS FONG-SAKAI

SAN DIEGO, Calif. — The abundance of rain that we experienced this winter may have made some of us temporarily forget an important fact about San Diego - water is a scarce resource in our region. The recent rains were certainly a benefit to our local reservoirs, but they do not change the fact that we are still a drought-prone region that needs to make the most of our limited water supplies.

San Diego imports an average of 85% of its water supply. As our city continues to grow and prosper, it has never been more important to maximize the use of our locally produced water supplies, including recycled water. The City of San Diego has the capacity to produce up to 45 million gallons per day of recycled water using technologies that merely speed up the water purification process that nature does on its own over time.

The City is currently in the midst of an important effort to analyze how we can maximize our use of recycled water to help meet our growing water supply needs. The 2005 Water Reuse Study is an unbiased, science-based analysis of all of the options available to increase our use of this important resource. These options include everything from expanding our current distribution system for non-potable reclaimed water use to

using recycled water to augment our reservoirs and recharge groundwater basins.

A crucial part of the Study is the City's extensive public involvement effort. The centerpiece has been two American Assembly-style workshops, both of which I had the privilege of participating in. After our workshop in July, this group of diverse stakeholders from all across San Diego issued a consensus statement endorsing the use of recycled water for everything from increased irrigation to reservoir augmentation, which would blend recycled water with other water sources where it will eventually become a part of our drinking water system. While the Assembly recognized that this option has its detractors, all members are confident that the science behind the technology is sound and it must be an option on the table for serious consideration.

With San Diego's dry climate and growing economy, it is important that we consider all options for ensuring a safe and reliable water supply. The 2005 Water Reuse Study is an important step forward in ensuring that recycled water helps us toward this goal. (*Lois Fong-Sakai is a registered civil engineer and was a participant in the American Assembly for the 2005 Water Reuse Study.*)