



## Summer 2015

**VX News:** VX News has covered Southern California's transition to collaborative water management extensively. Can you speak to how the Replenishment District fits into this larger push by municipalities and local jurisdictions toward "One Water"?

**Robert Katherman:** Two recent historic Superior Court decisions on storing water in our basins will enable water to be stored in wet years for pumping in dry years. Our groundwater aquifers have nearly a half million acre-feet of empty space that can be used for water storage, like a large reservoir.

The use of this newly accessible and significant groundwater storage space in our basins will only further our region's water independence. This will not only provide benefits to our service area, but will provide relief to the entire State during times of drought or natural disaster.

**VX News:** Let's pivot now to the Bay-Delta Conservation Plan, which you were very supportive of in our last interview. The governor has evolved that plan. Share your thoughts about its merits, challenges, and value.

**Robert Katherman:** Fixing the Sacramento Delta is critical to our state for a long-term reliable water supply and the preservation of the Delta as a natural ecological area. A lot of stakeholders are not supportive of the plan, and so we're unfortunately looking at a lengthy approval process that will have to go through the court system. I think we're looking at another decade or two before that project comes online. In the meantime we have to look to local recycled water, stormwater capture, and conservation.

**VX News:** Speaking of challenges and the need for better collaboration, address the outcome of litigation regarding WRD and the Central Basin Water District, and also Prop 218.

**Robert Katherman:** As I stated earlier, we have tremendously good news on groundwater storage. Litigation that started 15 years ago over the ability to store water in the half a million acre-feet of unused aquifer space has finally settled. To put this 500,000 acre-feet into perspective, that's about 75 percent of the size of Diamond Valley Reservoir, which

cost the Metropolitan Water District over \$2 billion dollars to construct. We have that existing resource beneath our feet that can be utilized now.

On Prop 218 litigation, we have recently negotiated a settlement with the three litigant cities. While we still believe Prop 218 does not apply to adjudicated groundwater basins, we voluntarily adopted a protest hearing process two years ago, and have, in the settlement, agreed to voluntarily continue that process while the courts decide whether groundwater pumping fees are subject to Prop 218.

Central Basin dropped its lawsuit against WRD more than a year ago when two new Board members were elected. We are now working closely with that agency.

**VX News: For context, we note that you were elected to WRD a decade ago. You most likely were not a water buffalo when first appointed. Describe your learning curve.**

**Robert Katherman:** It was steep, to say the least.

But I did have a background in environmental engineering, and I was on the Water Commission in the City of Torrance for five years, where I got an education from the water pioneers who started out in the West Basin 50 years ago. At least I had an elementary knowledge of water when I started.

The water business has become significantly more complicated as climate change and costs of water have increased dramatically.

**VX News: Lastly, Lillian Kawasaki, a former WRD board member, championed the WRD ECO Gardener Program. As a tribute to Lillian, please elaborate on its origins and purpose.**

**Robert Katherman:** Five years ago, the Water Replenishment District started an “eco-gardener” water gardening and conservation program designed to educate professional landscapers and gardeners on how to plant drought-tolerant plants, water-saving irrigation practices, and garden design.

Our director, Lillian Kawasaki, who was a legend in the local environmental community, was a big proponent of that program and greatly expanded it. We now have weekly water conservation education for homeowners as well as professional landscapers. We’ve named that program after Lillian, who passed away, unfortunately, a couple years ago.