



O R A N G E C O U N T Y
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March 11, 2011

Assemblyman Jose Solorio
State Capitol
P.O. Box 942849
Sacramento, CA 94249-0069

RE: AB 275 (Solorio): The Rainwater Capture Act of 2011

Honorable Assemblyman Solorio,

Orange County Coastkeeper (Coastkeeper) is a grass roots environmental organization with the mission to preserve, protect and restore the watersheds and coastal environment of Orange County. As the Executive Director of Coastkeeper, I write to support AB 275, The Rainwater Capture Act of 2011.

It is widely known that southern California is highly dependent on imported water from the Sierra Nevada Snowpack and Colorado River for its water needs. Longer drought conditions and significant increases in population have increased the strain on these two sources of imported water. Southern California received significant rainfall in late 2010, but most of that rainwater made its way to the Pacific Ocean and other bodies of water without being properly captured or utilized. Since those rainstorms, the Sierra Nevadas received only thirteen percent of the average rainfall in January for that area, which will lessen the amount of available water for southern California in the later part of the year.

It is predicted that much of California's future precipitation will be in the form of rain rather than snow, rendering ineffective the many reservoirs already in place which are designed to capture snow melt rather than rainfall. It is also predicted that snowmelt will begin to take place earlier in the year, requiring flood control reservoirs to be emptied to protect against storms later in the year. This could reduce the amount of early snowmelt that can be stored and will lead to more water shortages. California, like anywhere else in the country, is extremely reliant on rainwater, yet the runoff from precipitation is treated as a waste product which is channeled or funneled to the nearest body of water. Plans focused on water conservation have been implemented in California, but little has been done to promote the capture and proper conveyance of rainwater.

AB 275 would authorize homeowners and contractors to use the three different rainwater capture systems: unconnected rain barrels, connected rainwater capture systems for outdoor, non-potable uses, and connected rainwater systems for indoor, non-potable uses. The rain barrels will collect the first flush of rainwater coming off of roofs during a storm event. This first flush contains the most pollution and sediments. Instead of that pollution travelling straight to a storm water drain and then to a local water body, it will be stored in barrels for use on a homeowner's property. In addition, by keeping water onsite, the rainwater can be used to replenish underwater aquifers. This will not only conserve water but will reduce pollution in local water sources.

The Rainwater Capture Act of 2011 will not require state and local authorities to implement rainwater capture systems – it simply authorizes the use of capture systems without the need of a permit. Current regulations and permit requirements make it difficult and discouraging for individuals to implement common sense rainwater collection systems. This legislation would help alleviate those concerns by eliminating those current permit requirements. The goals of the legislation are: 1) to assist in reducing the need for potable water and 2) to assist in achieving the statutory objective of a twenty-percent reduction in urban per capita water use by the year 2020, without changing any existing property or water law rights.

The Rainwater Capture Act of 2011 is revenue neutral and cost effective legislation. It promotes smart conservation technology that will lessen southern California's reliance on imported water sources by authorizing the capture of water for outdoor use (landscape irrigation) as well as indoor, non-potable uses (toilet and urinal flushing). These rainwater capture systems require no electricity and allow citizens to make small contributions to water conservation and collection. In addition, the bill could have a number of economic benefits by potentially allowing contractors to develop a niche market of designing and installing the exterior components of a rainwater capture systems while also decreasing the state's need to develop and maintain expensive, inefficient public works projects designed to capture rainfall. Georgia, Virginia, and Oregon have all directly permitted the use of captured rainwater indoors and Texas is in the process of establishing its own system.

Orange County Coastkeeper has been committed to educating residents in Orange County about water conservation efforts, and in 2008 established the Orange County Stormwater Infiltration Retrofit Pilot Program to show Orange County residents how they can reduce water pollution and conserve water. The program seeks to reduce the amount of polluted urban runoff from residential properties in Orange County while also reducing the use of imported water and putting more water in our aquifers. When people over water their landscapes, excess runoff that spills onto sidewalks and streets can carry pollutants such as fertilizers, pesticides, bacteria, oil and metals into our local waterways. Orange County is largely urbanized; therefore, to achieve water quality and water conservation objectives local residents must be engaged. By managing runoff close to its source, Low Impact Development (LID) can enhance the local environment, protect public health, and improve community livability. AB 275 will allow more residents to take advantage of water conservation practices and will increase their own water dependence and security. For more information about Coastkeeper's efforts in regards to water conservation and low impact development, please visit our website at <http://www.coastkeeper.org/lid/>.

Orange County Coastkeeper encourages continued support of this legislation. AB 275 is an important step in reducing southern California's dependence on imported water while also helping to curb pollution from urban runoff. We appreciate your continued support.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Garry Brown". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Garry Brown
Executive Director
Orange County Coastkeeper