Searching for new water sources and ways to bring balance to the aquifer

Quichapa Lake recharge project

Quichapa Lake fed by Coal Creek sits just west of Cedar City. However, the water there is largely wasted as it never makes it into the aquifer.

Flood mitigation efforts that the Central Iron County Water Conservancy District used to help recharge the aquifer, Cedar City, Utah, March 17, 2017 | Photo by Tracie Sullivan, St. George News / Cedar City News

“Quichapa has lot of evaporation and that water just goes to waste,” Cozzens said. “The lake has so much clay and silt that has been built up over eons, it won’t allow the water to naturally percolate and recharge the aquifer. That water out there is absolutely no good to us.”

Officials from Cedar City, Iron County and the conservancy district along with property owners have worked together to build a new diversion structure that will divert excess Coal Creek water before it ever makes it to the lake.

The water will then be channeled northwest, under state Route 56, and pumped to a recharge area near Cedar City’s
The project is located in an area that has seen the largest water level declines, Monroe said, as well as known subsidence at the ground surface.

To build the project, CICWCD received a $100,000 grant from the Enterprise and Iron Conservation District, which is under the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food.

“This project is going to help reverse the current trend of drawing down more water from the aquifer than what is being replenished,” Cozzens said. “So the majority of the water that is traveling to the Quichapa Lake and is wasted will now be captured and diverted to use to recharge the aquifer.”

Flood mitigation

Finally, the conservancy district is taking advantage of an opportunity to temporarily put water back into the aquifer via a flood mitigation project using a gravel pit owned by Western Rock.

The project was not built with the intention of recharge efforts but rather a way to help mitigate flooding during the spring months. However, Cozzens saw a chance for the district to use the water being pumped into the gravel pit as not only flood mitigation but as a way to recharge the municipal well.
The city had to initially get approval from the Federal Aviation Administration due to the project’s location near the airport and concerns that the water would draw in birds. As a result, airport personnel took steps to safeguard the airport runway from the birds.

City workers used 1,000 feet of 33-inch concrete pipe to pump the water from Coal Creek to the pit. By using 650 feet of used pipe the city had laying around the entire project only cost the district about $5,000 and the city another $5,000. It was completed in February and has already dumped more than 500 acre-feet of water into the pit with about 60 percent already going into the ground for recharge efforts, Cozzens said.

“This has been an amazing side benefit and a wonderful opportunity for us to be able to put water into the aquifer,” Cozzens said.

In addition to recharge projects, the conservancy district is also working on importing water from another basin located in the West Desert and conservation efforts to help restore the aquifer. Cedar City News will continue to cover these issues and bring our readers more information on what is being done to solve these issues affecting all Iron County residents.
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