



The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California

NEWS RELEASE

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NOTE: A digital photograph of Dennis B. Underwood is available upon request.

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**DENNIS UNDERWOOD, METROPOLITAN CEO/GENERAL MANAGER,
RESPECTED WATER INDUSTRY LEADER, PASSES AWAY
He was a former commissioner of U.S. Bureau of Reclamation**

Dennis B. Underwood, an esteemed Western water expert and former commissioner of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation who recently became the chief executive officer and general manager of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, has died. He was 60.

Underwood was selected last April to the top post at Metropolitan after playing a leading role in a crucial and complex effort regarding California's share of Colorado River supplies as well as negotiating one of the nation's largest habitat conservation programs. He was surrounded by family and friends when he passed away Wednesday at his Alta Loma home after a battle with cancer.

"The water world has lost one of its most accomplished and humble leaders," said Metropolitan's board Chairman Wes Bannister of Underwood's passing. "The underlying theme of Dennis' entire career was to balance needs with grace. That meant that every cause and every project he was involved in was tempered by clear, well-negotiated and respectful interaction with everyone on both sides of the table."

Bannister said Metropolitan will have to "work hard to maintain the spirit of his career and to honor him by moving forward thoughtfully and with purpose, being mindful of our role as a steward for the public and the environment." In Underwood's honor, Bannister directed the American, state and Metropolitan flags to be flown at half-staff at all MWD facilities.

"Dennis' unique finesse and steadfast commitment to securing a balanced approach to resolving complex and highly sensitive water issues were an inspiration," Bannister added.

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“I am deeply saddened by the news of Dennis’ death,” said Interior Secretary Gale Norton. “As a former commissioner of Interior’s Bureau of Reclamation and a major architect of the Lower Colorado River Multi-species Conservation Plan, Dennis was a creative and dynamic force in improving the management of Western water and promoting environmental protection and enhancement.”

Calling Underwood “a great friend and colleague,” Reclamation Commissioner John Keys said today that the water world has suffered a great loss.

“I credit Dennis with creating an atmosphere where people can find creative solutions rather than seeking out new ways to do battle. While there are lots of issues and disputes and concerns on the Colorado River today, one thing that I’m sure everyone can agree on is that Dennis Underwood was one of the great leaders in the modern history of the Colorado River,” Keys said.

Underwood took a medical leave of absence in late October and designated Debra C. Man as acting CEO and general manager. Man, who was Metropolitan’s chief operating officer, will continue in this role while MWD’s Board of Directors considers steps to name Underwood’s successor.

"The water community has suffered a tremendous loss," said Lester Snow, director of the state Department of Water Resources. "Dennis was one of the most dedicated, compassionate, and knowledgeable public servants I have ever had the pleasure to know and work with. His work ethic and commitment to balanced resource management made him a leader. His vision will be missed."

When Underwood was selected as the district’s 12th general manger, he said serving as CEO of Metropolitan would be the crowning jewel in his long, varied life in the world of water.

Soon after assuming his new Metropolitan role, Underwood reflected on his own personal philosophy and thoughts regarding public service in an article he penned for a district employee publication.

“I think I am a reflection of the heartland of the country,” he wrote in Metropolitan’s People.interactive publication. “I am not the kind of person who will walk across your lawn to get where I am going. Instead, I will walk around. I have respect for other people and a good

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sense of right and wrong. I have strong ties to public service, where you can contribute to make the world a better place and where you can wake in the morning and feel better about yourself.”

In his limited time as CEO and general manager, Underwood launched several initiatives designed to further enhance the water district’s relationships with Metropolitan’s 26 member public agencies as well as with the varied organizations, agencies and other partners that have a stake in California’s water future. Underwood believed that inspiring the creativity and dedication of Metropolitan’s 1,800 employees through open and constant communication with executive management was essential for the agency.

Prior to being named CEO and general manager, Underwood was Metropolitan’s vice president of Colorado River resources. In that role, he was pivotal in California’s development of a plan to bring the state’s water use in compliance with its legal apportionment for Colorado River supplies.

He also helped forge a first-of-its-kind, long-term program that would pay farmers in the Palo Verde Valley near Blythe to annually set aside a portion of their land, rotate their crops, and transfer saved water to urban Southern California.

Just before being named CEO, Underwood helped negotiate one of the nation’s largest habitat conservation programs, covering 27 species along more than 450 miles of the lower Colorado River. The agreement covered the 50-year program that protects the storage, release and diversion of Colorado River water from Lake Mead to the Mexico border from interruptions because of endangered species issues.

As the district’s point person on Colorado River issues, Underwood was Metropolitan’s liaison to river basin states, California’s agricultural water interests and the Department of the Interior. He also served as the district’s staff representative at Colorado River Board meetings.

Spanning nearly four decades, Underwood’s career includes water resource development and management at both the state and federal levels.

As commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation from 1989 to 1993, Underwood directed and managed all of the bureau’s activities related to water, energy, land, conservation, environmental protection and enhancement, and endangered species management and recovery for 17 western states. He also oversaw a staff of about 7,500 employees and a \$1.5 billion annual budget.

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Underwood served as executive director and executive secretary for the Colorado River Board of California from 1978 to 1989, working with stakeholders in the water and power resources of the Colorado River system including the seven Colorado River Basin states and other federal resource agencies. Underwood also worked for the California Department of Water Resources from 1966-1967 and 1969-1978, with his tenure interrupted by military service in Vietnam.

During his career, Underwood consulted with many organizations, including the United Nations and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, where he served for two years, attaining the rank of captain.

“All of this experience has helped me to develop a strong negotiating tactic,” Underwood wrote in his People.interactive article. “I believe that you have to know the other person’s rights and interests better than they do. Your integrity and credibility become priceless.”

Recognizing his service to sound management of water resources in the West, the National Water Resources Association recently honored Underwood with its Distinguished Service Award for 2005. Underwood joined 10 members of the U.S. Congress, two governors, and several cabinet officials from previous administrations who have received the award. NWRA’s Board of Directors also designated Underwood as a life member of the association.

A resident of Alta Loma, Underwood earned a bachelor’s degree in civil engineering from Norwich University, the nation’s oldest military college in Northfield, Vt.

He is survived by his wife, Carmen; his daughter and son-in-law, Michelle and Ryan Dejournett of California; five brothers, Russell and Lawrence of Massachusetts, Rory of Vermont, Kevin of Maine, and Jeffrey of New Hampshire; and two grandsons.

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The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California is a cooperative of 26 cities and water agencies serving 18 million people in six counties. The district imports water from the Colorado River and Northern California to supplement local supplies, and helps its members to develop increased water conservation, recycling, storage and other water-management programs.