

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Board President of Conserve Southwest Utah

Conserve Southwest Utah Will Oppose 2019 Property Tax Increase for the Water Conservancy District

ST. GEORGE, UT (November 28, 2018) – Conserve Southwest Utah (CSU) encourages citizens to attend the public hearing on December 5th, 2018, at 6:00 PM at the Washington County Water Conservancy District building (533 E Waterworks Drive in St. George) to educate themselves on a proposal to raise next year's property tax. CSU opposes the basic concept of a property tax to supplement the price charged for water delivery since these taxes hide the true cost of water and make it difficult for individual homeowners to reap the full benefit of their investments in efficiency. This approach also compounds the problem of housing affordability.

In 2015 sixty-nine cents of every dollar paid to the water conservancy district came from individual property taxes and new home impact fees paid by homebuilders. "Most of us in St. George and Washington County recognize the value of using our water wisely and understand that the free market is an important tool to bring supply and demand into balance", said Tom Butine, CSU's Board President. "But when more than 2/3 of our water dollars are divorced from the amount of water we use, we lose a powerful incentive and means of financial reward for investments in efficiency. These mechanisms are anti-conservation. On top of that, this has the flavor of a regressive tax, hitting lower- and fixed-income families much harder than higher-income families. It's a bad idea."

"Even the opportunity to use new construction impact fees as a means to address wise and efficient water use are being wasted," said Patrick Barickman of CSU's "Water Works" team. "Imagine if there was a reduction in impact fees – that could be passed along to the homebuyer – when water-wise landscaping was part of a new home design. There are certainly ways to both decrease the property tax burden and increase home affordability by taking another look at how we are asked to pay for water."

"We have heard that this tax increase is targeted to help pay for the Lake Powell Pipeline", says Lisa Rutherford, a CSU board member. "If so, that is another reason to oppose it: we should not be funding such a risky and unnecessary project that has so many unresolved issues. Furthermore, the vast majority of water districts in the country do not collect property taxes for water, proving it is unnecessary for sound fiscal management."

CSU argues that there is a better way to structure water finances. The results of the current system are not in the best interests of businesses, homeowners, and community. They:

- Penalize individuals who want to make individual investments in efficiency
- Disadvantage lower- and fixed-income homeowners
- Collect high impact fees on new construction and miss the opportunity to structure those fees to design low water use in the future
- Add to the problem of home affordability through increased property taxes

We should be phasing out the property tax line item for water, not adding to it.

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Conserve Southwest Utah (CSU) is a 501.c.3 non-profit grassroots coalition of local citizens advocating conservation the area's natural resources (our public lands, our water and our air) and cultural resources (the remnants of native and pioneer activity) and for the Smart Growth principles that enable conservation, for the benefit of present and future generations.

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