

# **Brief Description of Community Services Districts**

**Attachment 5**

## A Brief Description of Community Services Districts

Focused service --- that's the answer to the question "What's so special about special districts?"

That question is also the title to the Senate Local Government Committee's citizen's guide which describes what special districts are and what they do. What's a special district? As the Committee's citizen's guide explains, special districts have four distinguishing characteristics:

- A form of local government,
- Governed by a board,
- Providing services and facilities,
- Within defined boundaries.

The Community Services District Law (Government Code §61000, et seq.) is just one of nearly 55 principal acts that form the statutory basis for governing California's nearly 3,300 special districts. Local voters have approved the formation of community services districts (CSDs) that serve a wide variety of diverse neighborhoods, rural towns, and sprawling suburbs. In 2002-03, the State Controller counted 318 CSDs. Because most CSDs' governing boards consist of five directly-elected directors, at least 1,500 local elected officials rely on the CSD Law. Like other types of special districts, it is possible to sort CSDs by their services, their geography, their territory, and their governance.

Services. Most CSDs provide just one or two public services. For example, the Lanare CSD (Fresno County) runs a small water system. Other CSDs are multi-purpose special districts, delivering several services; the Bear Valley CSD (Kern County) offers police protection, parks, road maintenance, waste disposal, water, and other services.

Geography. Some CSDs serve single neighborhoods; the boundaries of the Wallace CSD (Calaveras County) are the same as the Wallace Lake Estates subdivision. A few, like the Elk Grove CSD (Sacramento County) serve over 100,000 residents.

Territory. Most CSDs serve territory in just one county; Hidden Valley Lake CSD in Lake County is an example of a single-county CSD. The Dublin San Ramon Services District covers territory in both Alameda County and Contra Costa County; an example of a multi-county CSD.

Governance. The overwhelming number of CSDs rely on directly-elected boards of directors for their governance. For example, the Stallion Springs CSD (Kern County) has a board of directors elected by the registered voters who live inside that CSD's boundaries. Observers call these "independent special districts" (see Government Code §56044 and §61007 [d]). A small number of CSDs are dependent special districts; that is, they depend for their governance on a city council or a county board of supervisors. The Laguna Niguel City Council is the *ex officio* board of directors of the CSD (Orange County). Most CSDs, whether independent or dependent, have five-member boards of directors, but the Mountain Meadows CSD (Kern County) had a three-member board as allowed by the 1955 CSD Law.