

# JANUARY 2019 NEWSLETTER

## SANTA YNEZ RIVER WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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(DECEMBER 21, 2018)

### 1. Mail / Office Visits

**WE MOVED!** We are located in the same building but in a different suite. We are now at 3669 Sagunto Street, Suite 101 (in the front, next to Dr. Elder, DDS).

**Please send mail to our post office box.** Mail is not delivered to the office location.

**Announcement of Staff Change:** For the past 23 years, Bruce Wales has served as the General Manager of the Santa Ynez River Water Conservation District. On November 1, 2018, Bruce transitioned from General Manager to the role of Strategic Advisor. As Strategic Advisor, Bruce will be assisting staff with ongoing technical issues and will likely retire sometime in the Spring of 2019. We all wish Bruce well in his future endeavors.

Bill Buelow is the Interim General Manager in addition to his roles as Groundwater Program Manager and coordinating compliance with SGMA. Else Wolff is the Surface Water Program Manager. Amber Thompson will continue as the District Administrator. Shirley Scales will continue as the Administrator for the Groundwater Reporting Program. Should you have any questions about these staff changes, please feel free to contact the District office.

### 2. Newsletter Distribution

This Newsletter is sent semi-annually with the Groundwater Production Statements. Please distribute it within your organization. Understanding the challenges that we face in protecting your water rights and supplies is important to everyone.

### 3. Water Supplies During Continued Drought

The years 2012 through 2018 have surpassed the county's previous worst drought and has become the new drought of record. Although modest rainfall last winter provided groundwater recharge to shallow alluvial aquifers and the Lompoc Plain, low water levels prompted the sixth water rights release in the last six years. A total of 8,054 acre-feet of water was released, of which 1,448 acre-feet was delivered to the

Lompoc Plain.

Looking ahead, there are indications of improvement. El Niño conditions are a possibility with above average rainfall predicted for the winter season. Currently, the District has about 10,700 acre-feet of water available in Cachuma Reservoir for delivery in the summer of 2019 to the "Above Narrows Area". All water available for the Lompoc Plain was delivered during the 2018 release. The actual water credits available in both water rights accounts next summer, as well as any winter recharge to both the riparian and groundwater basins, will be determined by the number, size and frequency of rain events from January through April 2019. Continued water conservation is recommended at this time.

### 4. Winter Storm Operations

Cachuma Reservoir is 69% empty. This provides about 134,064 acre-feet of space that would have to be filled before a spill could occur (this is called incidental flood control). However, in March 1991, when similar conditions existed, the reservoir was half-filled with a single large storm. With this in mind, we expect that if the reservoir spills, the Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) would implement Modified Winter Storm Operations to reduce peak flows in the Santa Ynez River in accordance with the Cachuma Project Settlement Agreement.

### 5. Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA)

The three Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) in the Santa Ynez River Valley Groundwater Basin (Basin) have until January 1, 2022 to develop Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSPs) in accordance with SGMA. This law provides specific provisions for the State of California to step in if local GSAs do not develop adequate GSPs, or do not otherwise comply with SGMA. Thus, although groundwater may be regulated by the State, SGMA is an opportunity for local control.

The California Department of Water Resources (DWR) characterizes the Basin as one basin where groundwater is of moderate importance. The three GSAs correspond to three Management Areas in the Basin which include: the Lompoc Area Basins and Santa Rita Valley are the Western Management Area (WMA); the Buellton Upland is the Central Management Area (CMA) and the Santa Ynez Upland is the Eastern Management Area (EMA). The Santa Ynez River and river underflow are regulated by the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) and are exempt from the new SGMA law.

The three GSAs correspond to the three management areas and are made up these member agencies: the County of Santa Barbara and the District in all three GSAs plus; the City of Lompoc, Mission Hills CSD and Vandenberg Village CSD for the WMA; City of Buellton for the CMA; and City of Solvang and ID#1 for the EMA.

As the Coordinating Agency for the three GSAs, the District is the primary contact for the Basin with DWR. As required by SGMA, an Intra-Basin Coordination Agreement will be developed to maintain a uniform approach and methods for the three GSPs developed in the Basin. The District will prepare this agreement in coordination with the other GSA member agencies involved.

Since forming the GSAs, the District in conjunction with the GSA member agencies has turned its attention to gathering data, determining the scope and cost of the GSP(s) and seeking funds to support the efforts. The District, working on behalf of the three GSAs, was successful in securing a Proposition-1 grant award of \$1 million. The award funds will be shared between the three GSAs and used for GSPs activities. The GSAs are currently hiring consultants to support the GSP work, which is scheduled to begin during the first quarter of 2019.

Each GSA will likely form an Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committees will be made up of stakeholders and or representatives of various groundwater users from the respective management area to provide input at certain points during the GSP development. Please contact us if you would like more information about the GSA Advisory Committee process.

Should you have questions or comments about SGMA, please contact Mr. Bill Buelow, Interim General Manager, who is leading the District's

SGMA efforts.

## 6. State/Federal Regulatory Issues at Cachuma

Bradbury Dam was built and is operated by USBR principally for the benefit of South Coast water users. However, USBR's appropriation of river water is regulated by state law, as administered by the SWRCB. Downstream water rights holders must rely on the permit conditions set on the Cachuma Project by the SWRCB to provide water downstream., to exercise their water right. This includes water pumped from riparian underflow and the Lompoc Plain. USBR also must comply with federal law, including the Endangered Species Act, which is administered by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to protect the endangered steelhead trout.

The water rights release procedures in use today were established in 1989. However, attempts by both the SWRCB and NMFS to change flows to accommodate endangered southern steelhead trout are ongoing. This issue and others relating to downstream water quantity, water quality, and peak flood flows were addressed in the 2002 Cachuma Project Settlement Agreement. By 2004, it appeared these matters would be resolved satisfactorily. However, a Final EIR was not completed until 2011.

SWRCB released a new draft Order in 2016. If implemented, it would support the Cachuma Project Settlement Agreement, but would impair WR 89-18 operations because of modified water releases for fish.

At the federal level, NMFS and USBR have been consulting on a new Cachuma Project Biological Opinion to protect endangered steelhead and it is likely a new Biological Opinion will be released in 2019. Although the current Biological Opinion does not seriously interfere with water rights releases, it is expected the new one could seriously impact both project yield and water rights releases. The District and other local agencies have significantly stepped up efforts on fisheries studies in anticipation of this event. There is no indication when or how these matters will be resolved. It appears certain that the District is entering yet another protracted and costly regulatory campaign.

*As always, we appreciate any comments or suggestions you may have. If you have any questions regarding the above activities, we will be pleased to answer them for you. Please contact Bill Buelow, Interim General Manager, at 805-693-1156 or by email to [bbuelow@sywrcd.com](mailto:bbuelow@sywrcd.com).*