

JANUARY 2018 NEWSLETTER

SANTA YNEZ RIVER WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

MAILING ADDRESS

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(DECEMBER 18, 2017)

1. Mail/Office Visits

Please send mail to our post office box. There is no delivery at the office location. Office visits are encouraged, but please call for an appointment.

2. Newsletter Distribution

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

3. Water Supplies During Continued Drought

Water supply conditions have improved since January 2017 when the District declared a riparian water shortage emergency. The above average precipitation last winter provided groundwater recharge to shallow alluvial aquifers and additional credits to the downstream water supplies in Cachuma Reservoir. The District this summer made its fifth water rights release in the last six years. A total of 12,200 acre-feet of water was released, of which about 4,465 acre-feet was delivered to the Lompoc Plain. The Lompoc Basin delivery portion of the release (37%) was among the highest the District has achieved.

Water levels along the river above the Narrows have improved to near normal conditions for now. Water levels on the Lompoc Plain are showing modest recovery from the all time lows experienced in Summer 2016. On the other hand, the rainfall last winter was not high enough to provide much recharge to the relatively deep upland basins, including the Santa Ynez, Buellton and Lompoc Uplands, including the Santa Rita Valley.

Looking ahead, significant challenges remain. The Santa Ynez Valley remains in persistent moderate drought, rainfall is much below average season to date, and below average rainfall is predicted for the entire winter season. Currently, the District has about 10,000 acre-feet available in Cachuma Reservoir for delivery next summer to the above Narrows area, but all of the water available for the

Lompoc Plain was delivered this year. The actual water credits available in both water rights accounts next summer, as well as any winter recharge to both the riparian and upland basins, will be determined by the number, size and frequency of storms during January through April 2018. Continued water conservation is recommended at this time.

4. Winter Storm Operations

Cachuma Reservoir is 60% empty. This provides about 111,500 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 accordance with the Cachuma Project Settlement Agreement.

5. Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA)

The SGMA will affect almost every well owner in the watershed. The Act requires the establishment of local Sustainable Groundwater Management Agencies (GSAs) by June 30, 2017, a deadline now past. GSAs have until January 1, 2022 to develop Sustainable Groundwater Management Plans (GSPs). The Act provides specific provisions for the State to step in if local GSAs are not formed, do not develop adequate GSPs, or do not otherwise comply with the new law. Thus, although groundwater may be regulated, the new law is an opportunity for local control.

The California Department of Water Resources (DWR) characterizes the Santa Ynez River Valley Groundwater Basin (SY Basin) as one basin where groundwater is of moderate importance. DWR allows that the SY Basin has three portions, which readers know as the Lompoc Area Basins (including the Santa Rita Valley), the Buellton Uplands and the Santa Ynez Uplands. (Santa Ynez River underflow is regulated by the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) and bedrock areas are mostly unregulated.) The District covers over 99% of

the area in the Buellton Uplands and the Lompoc Area Basins, exclusive of Vandenberg AFB which as a federal entity is exempt from SGMA. The District covers only 33% of the Santa Ynez Uplands. The County Water Agency is the only local agency covering the remainder of the Santa Ynez Uplands.

As described in previous Newsletters, the District acted quickly to assume leadership of SGMA in the Basin. Early in 2016, all the water providers in the basin (as well as the County Water Agency) executed a Memorandum of Understanding with the District to confirm cooperation and willingness to move forward with SGMA and to provide a broad outline on how to proceed.

In early 2017, the City of Buellton and the County Water Agency executed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the District to form a GSA in the Buellton Uplands. Similarly, the City of Lompoc, Vandenberg Village CSD, Mission Hills CSD and the County Water Agency executed a MOA to form a GSA with the District for the Lompoc Area Basins. Because the County Water Agency covers less than 1% of these areas outside of the District and Vandenberg AFB, it will be a non-voting member of both GSAs.

In the Santa Ynez Uplands, where 67% of the area is outside the District, the County Water Agency, I.D. No. 1 and the City of Solvang entered a MOA with the District. The County Water Agency will fund the hydrogeology studies required for the GSP in the Santa Ynez Uplands. The District will act as the Coordinating Agency and primary contact with DWR for the entire Basin. The District will also develop and execute an Intra-Basin Coordination Agreement to maintain a uniform approach and methods for the GSP(s) in the Basin, in coordination with the other agencies involved.

The District submitted the GSA applications for all three management areas to DWR before the June 30, 2017 deadline. Meeting this deadline ensured local control of the SGMA process.

Since forming the GSAs, the District has turned its attention to gathering data, determining the scope and cost of the GSP(s) and seeking available funds to support the efforts. In mid-November, the District, working on behalf of the three GSAs, submitted a grant application to DWR. The District and its partners in the GSAs have spent over \$350,000 to form the GSAs and submit the grant application. GSP costs have not been finalized, but they are expected to require several million dollars between now and January 30, 2022, the date by which GSP(s) are to be submitted to DWR.

The GSAs formed in all three management areas will be guided by Advisory Committees. Each Advisory Committee will be made up of stakeholders from the respective management area. Should you have questions or comments about SGMA, please contact Mr. Bill Buelow, the District's Water Resources Manager, who is managing 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 administrated by the SWRCB. Downstream water right holders must rely on the permit conditions set on the Cachuma Project by the SWRCB to provide water downstream so that they can exercise their rights, that is, pump water supplies from riparian underflow and the Lompoc Plain. USBR also must comply with federal law, including the Endangered Species Act, which is administrated by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to protect endangered steelhead trout.

The water rights release procedures we use successfully today were established in 1989. However, attempts by both the SWRCB and NMFS to change flows to accommodate endangered southern steelhead trout have been 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 fish water releases.

Of greater concern is the fact that NMFS has completed its new draft Biological Opinion (BiOp) for the Cachuma Project and has asked the SWRCB to defer the Board Order until the new BiOp is finalized. There is no indication when or how these matters will be resolved. It appears certain that the District will be 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 our General Manager, Bruce Wales, at the District (693-1156) or email bwales@syrwcd.com.