

SBCWD UPDATE SPRING/SUMMER 2013



SAN BENITO COUNTY WATER DISTRICT

Volume 7, Issue 2

Spring—Summer 2013

California Sees Record Dry Water Year at the Start of 2013

Surveyors reported at the end of March that while the snowpack hasn't actually lost much water content since January's measurement, it hasn't increased, and is now just 66% of average for this time of year.

Back in January, after the wet storms of November and December, the snowpack was at 134% of average. Now, those readings indicate California's "frozen reserve" is low. The snowpack normally provides about a third of water for the state's homes, businesses and farms.

If January and February have seemed abnormally dry, they were. The Department of Water Resources says the mountain area from Shasta Lake to the American River near Sacramento has only measured about two inches of rain this year. The next-driest January–February period was in 1991, when they had four inches of rain.

"Near-record dry weather combined with pumping restrictions to protect Delta smelt are making this a gloomy water supply year," said Department of Water Resources Director Mark Cowin in a press release.

Despite the low snowpack, storage reservoirs are above

normal levels. Lake Oroville is at 113% of average for this date, Shasta Lake is 107% normal storage level.

January through March in the Northern Sierra Nevada is likely to go down as the driest such period since California began surveying its mountain snowpack in the 1920s.

The state Department of Water Resources conducted its final monthly snow survey of the winter, intended to measure snow depth and water content at their winter peak.

This year's peak is rather puny: The survey found the snowpack is just 52 percent of average statewide.

The data also show that the northern Sierra, a region crucial to statewide water supplies, has seen only 5.5 inches of precipitation since Jan. 1. The previous low on record is 1923, which saw 8.4 inches of precipitation in the same three months.

It is a gloomy end to a winter that started out bright. Storms in November and December delivered about 200 percent of average precipitation to the state. Then the tap went dry in January and February, normally the wettest months of the year.

Thanks to November and



Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta

December most key storage reservoirs are near average levels.

This includes the state's two largest reservoirs: Lake Oroville on the Feather River is at 108 percent of average capacity for the date, while Lake Shasta on the Sacramento River is at 102 percent.

"It's shaping up to be a much drier year than anticipated, and that means we'll likely have to draw down storage in key reservoirs," said Terry Erlewine, general manager of the State Water Contractors.

The final winter snow survey is crucial to determine how much runoff will be available for water supply through the state's typically dry summers.

While the state has not formally declared a drought, John Laird, secretary of the California Natural Resources Agency, urged all residents to do their part by conserving water every day.

"Take a shorter shower, be mindful of how long your sprinklers run and fix that leaky faucet," Laird said in a statement.

Water supply updates will be made as appropriate and will be posted on:

<http://www.usbr.gov/mp/pa/water>

For additional information, please contact the Public Affairs Office at: 916-978-5100 (TTY 916-978-5608) or email:

mppublicaffairs@usbr.gov.

Reclamation Announces Update to 2013 Central Valley Project Water Supply Allocation:

As a result of extremely dry conditions in California, the Bureau of Reclamation announced an update to the Water Year 2013 water supply allocation for the Central Valley Project.

The January – March period is tracking to be the driest on record, resulting in a critical classification for both the Sacramento and San Joaquin river basins based on the 90-percent exceedence forecast. Reclamation is announcing a decrease in the allocation for the following South-of-Delta water service contractors:

- Agricultural water service contractors' allocation is decreased from 25 to 20 percent of their contract supply.
- Municipal & Industrial contractors' allocation is decreased from 75 to 70 percent of their historic use.

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Frank Gehrke, chief of snow surveys for the Department of Water Resources checks the snowpack depth during the snow survey near Echo Summit California.



On Farm Water Conservation Methods

Irrigation Scheduling

Deciding when and how much water to apply to a field has a significant impact on the total amount of water used by the crop water use efficiency and irrigation efficiency. A number of different scheduling systems have been developed that can use either soil- plant or atmosphere-based measurements to determine when to irrigate. Using a more scientific approach to scheduling has generally been shown to decrease the amount of water applied while improving yield.

Tailwater Return Systems

To provide adequate water to the low end of the field, surface irrigation requires that a certain amount of water be spilled or drained off as tailwater. Tailwater return systems catch this runoff and pump the water back to the top of the field for reuse.

Irrigation System Improvements

Irrigation system improvement involves modifying the irrigation method or use of hardware and software to properly apply water to the field while minimizing water losses. For example improved furrows, combination of furrow and sprinkler, and changing from surface irrigation (flood, furrow and border check) to pressurized systems. Changing from surface irrigation to pressurized systems (sprinkler, drip, microirrigation) generally increases irrigation distribution uniformity and decreases applied water, although with certain soil types and applications, surface irrigation can be very efficient. In California there has been a trend to shift from surface irrigation to pressurized systems

District Events

On January 24, 2013 the District sponsored an Irrigation Efficiency and Farm Water Management Class and on February 7th a workshop on Optimizing Fertilizer Inputs and Efficiency was given. These workshops focused on the general aspects of irrigation and fertilizer management, with an emphasis on production efficiency. These presentations were integrated within the background of a new regulatory environment for water quality

On March 19th the District participated in Farm Day at Bolado Park. The San Benito County Farm Bureau sponsors this event where 3rd graders from around the county are introduced to the wide and varied world of agriculture.

The District will join the Water Resources Association of San Benito County (WRASBC) in declaring May as Water Awareness Month. Since 1989, California water agencies celebrate May as Water Awareness Month with special events for their customers. May is the month when the weather starts to warm up and consumers need to be reminded to practice wise water conservation both inside and outside the home.

The WRASBC will be at the Farmer's Market in downtown Hollister during the month of May to distribute water conservation information and inform our community of their programs and services.

Make sure and visit the Water Wise Demonstration Garden on the corner of 6th and Powell in downtown Hollister (Dunne Park). See examples of drought tolerant and native plants with low water use requirements. The garden also has an efficient irrigation system and permeable pavers to allow water to seep in to the ground rather than create runoff that enters the storm drains.

To learn more about the WRASBC and their programs visit: www.wrasc.org

**MAY IS WATER AWARENESS MONTH
REVIEW YOUR WATER USE AND WATER SYSTEMS FOR WATER USE EFFICIENCY**

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Water Officials Tour Plant Sites, Receive Briefing on Hollister Urban Area Water Project (HUAWP)

City leaders, members of local water boards and agency staff participated in a tour and overview of the Hollister area's water system recently, getting a first-hand look at the community's major water source, seeing how the water is treated and transported, and learning how planned improvements will ensure a reliable source of water for years to come.

The tour and orientation, held Feb. 25, was an introduction of the Hollister Urban Area Water Project (HUAWP), which is a joint effort by the City of Hollister, Sunnyslope County Water District and the San Benito County Water District. The project builds on many years of previous efforts by local water officials to create a sustainable water supply for the greater Hollister area.

Guests visited the site of the planned West Hills Water Treatment Plant (not far from the San Justo Reservoir), then drove over the Pacheco Pass to the Pacheco Pumping Station near the San Luis Reservoir, and finished the day with a tour of the Lessalt Water Treatment Plant. The event was designed to give elected officials a broader view of Hollister's water system and illustrate why the HUAWP is needed.

Hollister Mayor Ignacio Velazquez, serving his first term after being elected in 2012, said he gained a new perspective on local water issues. "After touring our water facilities from San Luis Reservoir to San Justo Reservoir, I can now fully appreciate the difficult decisions made by past generations to fulfill our water needs here in San Benito," he said. "Providing a reliable and safe water supply to our current residents and for future generations must be our top priority."

Before setting out on a bus to tour various facilities, the water managers who lead the three agencies gave a presentation that included a history of local water planning and water sources, a description of the benefits of the HUAWP, and a discussion of the specific projects it includes.

San Benito County Water District Manager Jeff Cattaneo gave a description of the Hollister groundwater basin and a brief history of surface water in San Benito, with an emphasis on the significance of the San Felipe Project, which was approved by voters in 1977 and imports water from the Central Valley and State Water Projects. It includes the San Luis Reservoir, which provides water to San Benito and Santa Clara counties through a cooperative operating agreement.

Water from the San Felipe Project transformed the local agricultural economy by providing a source of reliable, high-quality water for local farmers. Cattaneo also explained that the San Felipe project "always envisioned that there would be water available for the city of Hollister and local residents." The HUAWP will bring that vision to fruition by providing additional treatment systems and increasing the amount of surface water, and decreasing the amount of groundwater, that will be delivered to Hollister and Sunnyslope customers.

Hollister City Manager Clint Quilter reviewed the history of the HUAWP, which got started in 2004 with a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) among the local agencies, a shared vision for a reliable local water supply. He explained the essential elements of the plan: better quality water; the ability to treat and use our wastewater now and in the future; and an affordable project.

"Our Governance Committee has spent a lot of time protecting the affordability of this project for the community," said Quilter. "And a more equitable way of distributing high quality water." He said that cooperation among the three agencies has been critical to the success to date of planning the project, noting that in the past there were serious issues among the water agencies that prevented a collaborative effort.



Visitors tour the inside of the Pacheco Pumping Plant, located near the San Luis Reservoir about 24 miles east of Hollister over the Pacheco Pass. The 12 large pumps in the left of the photo pump water west through the Pacheco Tunnel and Pacheco Conduit, where it is then diverted into the Hollister Conduit and the Santa Clara Conduit.

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Project Manager Harry Blohm said the formation of the HUAWP is in keeping with the community's wishes. "We began meeting with the public in 2005 regarding a new water project to improve quality and reliability," he said. "All said that they have been frustrated by an apparent lack of cooperation among all of the agencies and that they want all agencies to work together to solve our problems. Today, I think that we demonstrated that all are working together for a better future."



Quilter discussed the connection between improved drinking water and the ability to meet wastewater discharge requirements. Even with the improvements made at the City of Hollister and Sunnyslope wastewater treatment plants, improved drinking water treatment is needed to meet waste discharge requirements imposed by the state Regional Water Quality Board. By meeting discharge requirements, this will allow reclaimed water produced at the treatment plants to be used for agriculture and will protect water quality in the groundwater basin.

Sunnyslope County Water District (SSCWD) General Manager Don Ridenhour explained the specific projects that are included in the HUAWP. The first phase includes upgrades to the Lessalt Water Treatment Plant, construction of the new West Hills Water Treatment Plant, and pipelines to serve customers throughout the Hollister area. The first phase is estimated at \$30 million. A study is being conducted to analyze various rate increase scenarios to be considered by the City and SSCWD elected bodies.

At the Pacheco Pumping Plant the group was given a tour of the huge facility by staff from the Santa Clara Valley Water District, which operates the facility. It includes 12 large pumps that send water from the adjacent San Luis Reservoir through the seven-mile Pacheco Tunnel and into the Pacheco Conduit. The conduit then splits, sending water through the Hollister Conduit west to San Benito County and through the Santa Clara Conduit to Santa Clara County. Seeing the water system first hand, from reservoirs to pumping plants to water treatment systems, gave officials a better understanding of Hollister's water system and how planned improvements will provide water stability into the future.

The visit to the Pacheco Pumping Plant, demonstrated the benefits of the cooperative agreement between the San Benito Water Agency and the Santa Clara Valley Water District, which operates the pumping station. "Going up there and meeting with the Santa Clara Valley Water District showed us the importance of keeping down the costs in the future for reliable clean water by working together as agencies," said Danny Villalon, a SSCWD board member and member of the Governance Committee overseeing the HUAWP. "Santa Clara is a very good partner and a very good example of the benefits of two counties working together. We can do the same thing here among our local agencies and keep the costs down and make sure we have good quality water now and into the future."

A tour of the Lessalt Water Treatment Plant concluded the day's events. Plant operator Jim Filice explained how the plant's SCADA system allows SSCWD to operate the plant remotely and monitor its function via computer. With the planned upgrades to the plant, its capacity will be increased and it will meet new state treatment regulations by the end of 2013, regulations that were not in place when the plant was built.

San Benito County Water District Director John Tobias said the tour should help elected officials in communicating with their constituents about Hollister's water system. "They can go back and be more comfortable talking to their customers about what the water district does and the cost of their water," said Tobias. "They have a better idea about what the water district does to provide that water."

Tobias said the HUAWP is a cooperative effort to provide "good quality water for everyone." He said by helping improve water quality, it will help Sunnyslope and Hollister improve their wastewater process, and in turn provide recycled water that farmers can use. "Better water in is better water out," he said. "By creating better reclaimed water, we can supplement our water supply for high-dollar crops.

"This reclaimed water that comes out of the Hollister Wastewater Treatment plant is going to be more valuable," said Tobias, "as we all recognize based on the amount of rain we've had this year. If we can make that a resource, it's a benefit to everyone in the area."

For more information about the Hollister Urban Area Water Project, visit: <http://hollisterwaterproject.com/>