



Water Update

UNITED WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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Summer 2010

UWCD and its Partners to Push Regional Board to Enforce Chloride TMDL

At its meeting on July 27 the Santa Clarita Valley Sanitation District Board declined to approve wastewater rate increases necessary for moving forward with an agreed-upon project to bring chloride levels in the Santa Clara River into compliance with the Clean Water Act and the State's Porter-Cologne Act. The project, known as the Alternative Water Resources Management (AWRM) project was developed by United, local farming interests and Santa Clarita agencies following adoption by the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board of a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) standard for chlorides in the river. An increase in Santa Clarita sewer rates is necessary to begin to fund environmental analysis and design specifications for the project.

The Sanitation District Board had conducted a Prop. 218 process necessary to raise rates, and received protests from only 11 percent of Santa Clarita Valley parcel owners, well short of the necessary 50 percent. Nonetheless, the board declined to raise rates.

The rate proposal prepared by Sanitation District staff would have increased the sewer service charge from \$16.58 per month to \$24.67 per month over four years. This compares against current monthly sewer service charges of \$80.00 in Fillmore, \$59.39 in Santa Paula, \$25.00 in Ventura, and \$52.07 in Ojai. Approximately half of the proposed increase in the Santa Clarita Valley rates would have gone for the continued maintenance of existing facilities and half would be for work toward complying with state mandated chloride limits.

This issue is so important to United and Ventura County agriculture because high chloride levels coming across the county line pose harm to salt-sensitive crops such as avocados, strawberries and nursery stock, and they have led to increasing chloride build-up in the Piru groundwater basin. The primary source of the high chloride levels can be traced to treated wastewater discharged to the river in the Santa Clarita Valley.

In 2006 the L.A. Regional Board reaffirmed a previously adopted TMDL for chloride in the Santa Clara River of 100 mg/L and gave the Santa Clarita Sanitation District until 2015 to be in compliance with the TMDL standard. At that time it was expected that the cost of facilities necessary to reach compliance would cost over \$500 million.

In recognition of the extremely high estimated cost to fix the problem and that a cooperative approach could benefit the health of the river and local water resources, United and other Santa Clarita Valley and Ventura County parties met to work out a solution. The result was the AWRM plan, which utilizes a watershed-based approach to managing chloride levels. It would require substantially less facilities than the original proposal and would instead rely to a great degree on management of water resources affecting river flows and chloride levels. It also established a scenario under which chloride levels above the 100 mg/L TMDL could be tolerated for limited periods without harming Ventura County crops or groundwater. Most importantly, though, the plan would result in project cost which would decrease to about \$250 million.

In recognition of the support which AWRM had on both sides of the county line, the way it would meet the long-term goals of the Clean Water Act and Porter-Cologne Act, and the benefits that would be derived by the Santa Clara River as opposed to other plans, the L.A. Regional Board adopted slightly higher chloride levels under the plan but made such changes contingent upon implementation of AWRM. These changes were subsequently adopted by the State Wa-

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ter Resources Control Board.

Now, however, the Santa Clarita Valley Sanitation District Board has rejected rate increases necessary to move the plan along and appears to be choosing instead to try to challenge the Regional Board's rulings. This delay significantly jeopardizes the chance that the facilities included in the AWRM can be built and operating by 2016.

In response, United and Ventura County stakeholders is urging the L.A. Regional Board to immediately re-instate the 100mg/L limit for chlorides in the river and to use the full extent of its authority, including fines which could run into several thousand dollars per day, to compel the Sanitation District to comply with the law and take responsibility for the high chloride levels it is creating.

Fish Passage Review Panel Issues Draft Report

On August 31, the independent panel of experts assembled to assess the fish passage facilities of the Freeman Diversion Dam presented its draft report to United, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and Cal Trout. The panel was assembled to evaluate the Freeman facilities especially as they relate to the ability of endangered Southern California steelhead trout to pass the dam.

All four parties then assembled near the Los Angeles Airport on August 9 to discuss the draft. The panel is now preparing to issue its final report on September 15. A full review of the report and its implications to United will be provided in the next *Water Update*, and the report itself will be provided on United's website at www.unitedwater.org. Additionally, a public forum for the members of the panel to present their findings is being planned for October.

The Fish Passage Review Panel for the Freeman is made up of seven nationally-recognized experts on fish passage. It was asked to evaluate current fish passages facilities and develop alternative options for improving passage. Its work is important to maximize the likelihood that any changes to the Freeman's structure and its operation will benefit fish. In its work to date the panel has determined that the current fish ladder system is not effective enough to provide necessary fish passage given the specific dynamics of the Santa Clara River system.

United Files Brief in Suit Against

On August 12, UWCD took a step forward in its suit against the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) in the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit by filing a brief to meet a court deadline. The brief outlines United's case that requirements set forth in its renewed FERC license for Santa Felicia Dam are unreasonable. The requirements are functions of determinations by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) related to endangered Southern California steelhead trout.

Since the filing of the lawsuit in January of this year United has worked closely with NMFS to try to resolve the outstanding issues, and important progress has been made. It will continue to work with both NMFS and FERC, but United believes that the filing of the brief was necessary to put it in position to develop criteria for Santa Felicia Dam that make the most sense, both to ensure the well-being of steelhead and preserve the dam's water resources functions.



The face of the Freeman Diversion Dam at Saticoy

The panel developed a standard necessary for fish passage and a methodology for evaluating different options for modification. The group of experts continues to examine several options, including a ramp constructed within the current dam structure. The final passage structure will be worked out between United and NMFS as a part of a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) which will involve other of United's facilities. Also involved in the development of this HCP are other stakeholders, including the California Department of Fish and Game and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

GROUNDWATER CONDITIONS

Lake Piru Conservation Release to Begin September 17

On Friday, September 17 United will begin its annual water conservation release from Lake Piru, and approximately 33,000 acre-feet is expected to be released from that day through about the middle of November.

The release is being timed to coincide with the highest water demand period of the year in October. It is during late September and early October when the majority of local strawberries are planted, and during their first four to six weeks in the ground the seedlings require a large amount of water to get established.

On the 17th Santa Felicia Dam will begin releasing water at a rate of 400 cubic feet per second (cfs). As the water moves down lower Piru Creek and the Santa Clara River it will recharge the Piru, Fillmore and Santa Paula groundwater basins, and it is expected water will begin to arrive at the Freeman Diversion Dam about one week after the release begins. Once water starts to reach the Freeman it can then be diverted and provided for crop irrigation through United's two agriculture irrigation systems: the Pleasant Valley and Pumping Trough Pipelines.

At the point when the river water is sufficient to meet the demands of the two irrigation systems, the release rate at the dam will begin to be reduced. The rate will continue to be reduced to stretch out the period of the release for as long as possible while ensuring that the demands of the two pipelines are being met. The longer that United can provide surface water for irrigation, the less time those farms will be compelled to pump groundwater from already over-drafted groundwater basins on the Oxnard Plain.

The release of 33,000 acre-feet from Lake Piru will bring it down to 20,000 acre-feet "minimum pool" level, which is the point at which further release would cause sediment to be drawn into the dam's intake works. Though 33,000 acre-feet is substantially less than the amount that could be

released if the lake were at capacity over 80,000 acre-feet, it is more than the approximately 21,000 acre-feet which was released last year. It is also more than the historical average fall release of 25,000 acre-feet. The graphic on the following page illustrates lake storage changes in recent years.

United is also attempting to receive 3,150 acre-feet of State Project water down Piru Creek from Pyramid Lake in mid-November. If the conservation release can be extended to that time. This water will help to further extend the length of the release.

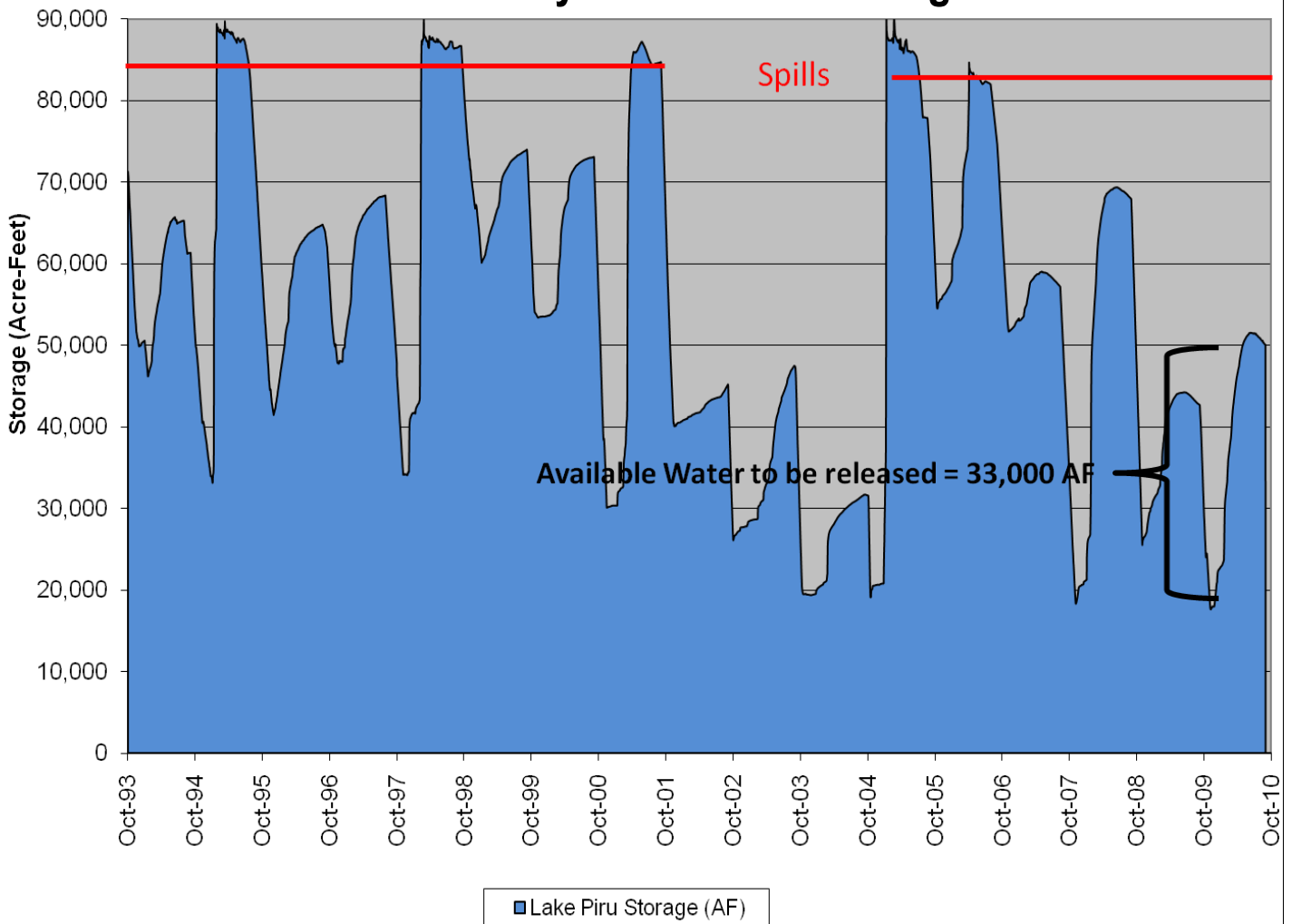
Though the release is being timed to help to maximize surface water that can be provided to agriculture, it is important to note that about half of the water that is sent down the river will actually recharge the local groundwater supplies.

Additionally, pursuant to United's requirements for operation of Santa Felicia Dam under its license with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, access for rafters will be provided below the dam on weekends during the conservation release as long as at least 200 cfs is being released. More information about rafting access is available on United's website, www.unitedwater.org.



Water Conservation Release from Santa Felicia Dam in 2007

Recent History of Lake Piru Storage



UWCD Launches New Website

In July United launched a new website. Though the website address, www.unitedwater.org, remains the same, almost everything else has changed. The new site is geared much more toward helping to explain what United does, the issues with which it is dealing, and the many ways it is working to achieve its goal of maximizing the benefit of local water for people and the environment.

The new website provides a wealth of information including staff responsibilities, board governance activities, water quality reports, reports of current hydrologic conditions, explanations of current projects, water rate information, and much more. Going forward it will allow United to conduct more of its business online including communication with groundwater and pipeline customers and handling bid processes.

We encourage you to visit www.unitedwater.org to see all that it has to offer.



Noticias de United Water Conservation District

- United Water está animando a Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Board para usar su autoridad para obligar a Santa Clarita Valley Sanitation District para cumplir con los límites de cloruro en el Río de Santa Clara.
- El Fish Passage Review Panel ha emitido un reporte final que se pondrá en circulación en 15 de septiembre. El reporte exhibirá recomendaciones para la transformación del dique para tener en cuenta el paso adecuado del pasaje de steelhead trout, *un pez en peligro de extinción*.
- La liberación de agua del 2010 en Lake Piru empezará en 17 de septiembre. La liberación comenzará con 400 *cúbicos pies por segundo*.
- United Water ha lanzado un nuevo sitio de web en www.unitedwater.org con mucha información y características nuevas.
- United Water continúa con dos proyectos separados para determinar más exactamente la extensión de intrusión de agua salada en las vasijas de aguas subterráneas a lo largo de la costa.

United Receives USBR Grant

On July 30, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation announced that United had been awarded a grant of \$78,268 through the Bureau's Water and Energy Efficiency Program. The grant is being presented to United to help offset costs of its Moss Screen Gate Automation Project and is recognition of the benefits that will be derived from the project compared to its costs.

As explained in detail in the spring *Water Update*, this project would connect operation of the gates at the Moss Screen facility to United's SCADA (Supervisory Control And Data Acquisition) system and will allow for much more responsive adjustments of water deliveries water to United's El Rio Spreading Grounds and to the Pleasant Valley and Pumping Trough irrigation pipeline systems.

It is projected that the project will result in an average annual increase of 3,500 acre-feet which can be spread at the El Rio Spreading Grounds where it is needed more than at Saticoy and an average increase of 500 acre-feet per year which can be diverted at the Freeman Diversion.

Studies of Extent of Seawater Intrusion Continue

The Groundwater Department at United has two geophysical projects in the works to more accurately determine the extent of seawater intrusion along the coast. No significant studies have been performed in nearly 20 years and previous tests were much more limited in the information provided.

One of the projects is a geophysical survey using the time domain electromagnetic method to map the areal extent of the saline water intrusion into the south Oxnard Plain. The field crew has collected approximately 150 geophysical soundings at locations extending from Port Hueneme to Point Mugu, the collection of which has been aided greatly by the cooperation of landowners and the Navy by allowing the geophysical crew access to their properties.

The goal of the project is to determine how far inland the saline waters have migrated since the last survey was performed in the early 1990s by the U.S. Geological Survey and to provide the data necessary to allow the District and other agencies such as the Fox Canyon Groundwater Management Agency to design appropriate groundwater management policies to protect water quality on the Oxnard Plain.

A second geophysical technique, seismic reflection, is going to be used on another project on the southern Oxnard Plain. The District was awarded a Local Groundwater Assistance Grant from the California Department of Water Resources to help fund the seismic survey, and geophysical equipment and crews are expected to be in the field collecting data starting in mid-September. This seismic data will be used to help understand how the subsurface geologic conditions are affecting groundwater movement in the area east and northeast of Port Hueneme. During September and October keep an eye out for the crews and their unusual looking vehicles along Hueneme Road, East Pleasant Valley Road and J Street.



UWCD Staff record electromagnetic readings of saline intrusion on the Oxnard Plain



Calendar

September 16 - AWA Annual Policymakers
Reception at Reagan Library

October 13 - Board Meeting
1:30 pm, UWCD Board Room

October 21 - AWA Water Wise Breakfast
7:00 am, Los Robles Banquet Center,
Thousand Oaks

November 10 - Board Meeting
1:00 pm, UWCD Board Room

**United Water Conservation District shall manage, protect, conserve and enhance
the water resources of the Santa Clara River, its tributaries and associated aquifers,
in the most cost effective and environmentally balanced manner.**

Mission Statement

United Water Conservation District

UNITED WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT
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