

# NEWS CLIPS

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**Resource Conservation and Public  
Outreach**

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## Blaze in Simi stirs concerns for season ahead of us

From Staff Reports Ventura County Star  
USA TODAY NETWORK 6/29/2018

A fast-moving brush fire Wednesday in Simi Valley that scorched 27 acres before crews effectively put an end to it may be an indication of what's to come this fire season.

As of Thursday, the cause of the blaze was still being investigated, said Capt. Steve Swindle, a spokesman for the Ventura County Fire Department.

The fire erupted at 4:10 p.m. near East Olsen Road in the city's Wood Ranch neighborhood, and firefighters battled the flames for about two hours before gaining the upper hand.

An estimated 150 firefighters, with the help of air crews, responded to the incident not far from the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library & Museum.

Firefighters stayed on the scene overnight to help put out hot spots and left the scene late Thursday morning, Swindle said. Fire engines were released about 9 a.m., and hand crews had left by about noon.

No structures were threatened and no injuries were reported as a result of the blaze, officials said.

The fire did slow traffic through the area during the afternoon commute and forced the closure of Olsen Road between Country Club Road and North Wood Ranch Parkway until nearly 11 p.m.

Wednesday's fire was a harbinger of "another really bad fire season," the fire captain said.

The Simi fire spread relatively quickly for a June day with temperatures only reaching 82 degrees with a light west wind behind it.

"Thankfully, the area didn't have more heavy brush," Swindle said.

On Thursday, crews mounted a fast response to a fire reported in Upper Ojai. The fire was reported at 4:47 in the 10400 block of Ojai-Santa Paula Road, and arriving crews found that it was 40 feet by 40 feet but had been put out by local residents.

Arriving crews reported the fire covered one-quarter acre of light to medium fuel.

At least one helicopter was dispatched to assist ground crews.

He said the fire outlook this year is pretty dire because the region is still suffering from about seven years of drought. Rainfall earlier this year was again below normal, he noted.

While the Thomas Fire, the state's largest fire in officially recorded history, hit the western side of Ventura County hard and left less brush to potentially burn in a future

fire, the other end of the county — Moorpark, Newbury Park, Simi Valley and Thousand Oaks — remains vulnerable.

“There’s still a lot of dead, dry brush over all of the hills,” Swindle said. “The east end of our county is still facing the same kind of threat fuel-wise as we did with the Thomas Fire in the west end of the county.”

He also said that in recent years, more housing has been built on hillsides. While the area is beautiful, it presents a greater danger to residents whose homes are less accessible.

Firefighters ask homeowners to take measures to ensure brush is cleared and create a plan to evacuate. The fire captain urged residents to be prepared not only for wildfires but also other potential disasters.

Information about disaster preparedness is available at [www.vcfd.org](http://www.vcfd.org) under the link for “Ready, Set, Go.”

# Arizona restarts talks on drought plan for Colorado River water

Felicia Fonseca ASSOCIATED PRESS  
Ventura County Star 6/29/2018

TEMPE, Ariz. – Arizona is renewing a focus on a drought contingency plan for the shrinking supply of Colorado River water, and other Western states are paying close attention.

An Arizona utility was accused earlier this year of manipulating the system that governs water allocations. The Central Arizona Project has since pledged to be more cooperative with other river users, more respectful and more transparent.

On Thursday, it is joining the Arizona Department of Water Resources to restart discussions in Arizona on how to create more predictability in the river supply amid drought and climate change. U.S. Bureau of Reclamation Commissioner Brenda Burman is the keynote speaker.

The agency has been prodding Colorado River states to wrap up drought contingency plans by the end of the year, one each in the lower and upper basins. The river serves about 40 million people in Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming.

The amount of water that gets sent to the lower basin states – Arizona, Nevada and California – and Mexico depends on Lake Mead, the reservoir formed by Hoover Dam.

Shortages would be triggered if the man-made reservoir on the Arizona-Nevada border dips to 1,075 feet above sea level. That's never happened, but the Bureau of Reclamation has put the possibility of a shortage at more than 50 percent in 2020 and says it's even more likely in subsequent years.

The states and Mexico agreed in 2007 on what levels would trigger shortages and where they would be felt, but they say those guidelines no longer fit reality. They've been trying to hash out a drought contingency plan that would spread shortages more widely and loop in California. Few details have been released publicly.

The absence of a plan resonates beyond the United States. Mexico wouldn't conserve more water if the lower basin states don't finalize a plan, said Chris Harris, executive director of the Colorado River Board of California.

The states also run the risk of Reclamation officials dictating what happens with the water without a negotiated solution.

"That creates this real uncertainty," said John Fleck, director of the University of New Mexico's Water Resources Program. "No one knows exactly where and when they would step in and what that stepping in would look like."

Harris said California agencies are still working out the details but said Burman's participation in the Arizona meeting is a step in the right direction.

“All of the other basin states are certainly watching what’s occurring in Arizona with interest and cautious optimism,” he said in an email.

Arizona is hit hardest at the current shortage levels as the junior player in the lower basin.

The Central Arizona Project controls much of the state’s allocation, delivering the water through a canal system. Upper basin users accused the utility earlier this year of stalling on a drought plan to avoid the water cutbacks it might require.

The utility and Arizona’s water agency also have been at odds over who gets to determine what happens to excess water.

Unlike other states, the drought contingency plan needs legislative approval in Arizona.

Southern Nevada should be able to absorb the 30,000 acre-feet in additional cuts outlined in the contingency plan for when the lake level reaches 1,025 feet, said John Entsminger, general manager of the Southern Nevada Water Authority in Las Vegas. An acre-foot is enough to supply an average family for a year.

“We already have a cooperative agreement to share costs, programs and any shortage that would be imposed,” he said.

*Associated Press writer Ken Ritter in Las Vegas contributed to this report.*

# Sanitation districts squabble over money

## It's Ventura versus Triunfo

By [The Acorn Staff](#) | on June 27, 2018

By Ian Bradley

Ventura County Regional Sanitation District wants to charge higher fees to the contracting sewer agency that serves Oak Park and other local communities. Customer rates could be affected.

The Triunfo Sanitation District services more than 30,000 people including residents of Oak Park, Lake Sherwood, Bell Canyon, the Westlake portion of Thousand Oaks and parts of North Ranch, but has no employees of its own.

The district is overseen by a board of five elected directors and operates under contract with the larger Ventura Regional Sanitation District, whose employees oversee Triunfo's day-to-day operations.

Triunfo is the Ventura district's largest member agency and accounts for about 20 percent of VRSD's budget.

Per their agreement, the smaller Triunfo agency pays a portion of Ventura's overhead and staff hours, a price which has stayed relatively consistent over the years. But following a reassessment of their budget earlier this year, VRSD said Triunfo needed to pay more into the kitty.

Mike Paule, Triunfo board chairman, said the new fees, which were first presented in April, are far too high.

"They were supposed to keep all the rates essentially status quo, except for a cost of living increase, which was maybe two-and-a-half percent," Paule said.

"(But) we had one budget workshop a couple weeks ago and that's when they came back with this (proposal). It was like an \$800,000 increase in just the VRSD portion of the Triunfo budget, so we immediately rejected that."

Paule said the need for a fee hike can be blamed in part on a Ventura district oversight. VRSD has several employees who are assigned solely to Triunfo, and their work hours had not previously been charged to Triunfo.

Triunfo officials asked VRSD to submit employee time cards for review.

VRSD revised its budget following Triunfo's objection to the new charges, but Paule said there were numbers to which he and his fellow board members still objected.

In years past, Ventura's general manager charged Triunfo for 40 work hours of work annually. But for the 2019 budget, VRSD general manager Chris Theisen changed that number to 430 hours, an increase of almost 1,000 percent.

Theisen said that because Triunfo is his district's biggest client, he must spend more time focusing on them.

At a budget workshop last week, Theisen's estimate of work hours for Triunfo was reduced to 100 hours for the year.

"We had a conversation about the hours at (the budget meeting), and I said, 'this is my best estimate,'" Theisen said.

"I satisfy my ethical compass by saying what I think it's going to cost, but I guarantee you it's wrong. It's either too high or it's too low. It's not going to be those hours exactly. It's a budget estimate," the general manager said.

While Theisen manages the entire Ventura agency, VRSD has a contract with Mark Norris to manage Triunfo specifically.

The 2019 budget for Triunfo projects that Norris will work 120 hours fewer than he did in years past, and the local board doesn't understand how Norris' hours can be reduced while Theisen's hours increase.

"I recommended they reduce the number of hours for me," Norris said. "I anticipate, hopefully, that the demand on my time is going down. That's not a function of VRSD staff or Chris Theisen taking on additional work that I've done in the past."

#### Checks and balances

Triunfo finalized its new budget Monday, and Paule said his agency wants to make sure it pays fairly for the services it receives.

He said although Triunfo has a contract with Ventura, they can sever ties if they wish.

"The bigger picture is our relationship with VRSD," Paule said.

"All we're trying to do is run the district in the most efficient manner at the lowest possible cost, so we have to scrutinize everything. It's really about the big picture. Are we getting the services we want at a fair price, and if not, what are our other options?"

#### New costs

Triunfo board member Janna Orkney said VRSD's higher costs are a concern as water agencies throughout the region come under increasing financial pressure due to drought and environmental costs.

Triunfo is working with the Las Virgenes Municipal Water District to construct a new water purification plant in Agoura Hills, and earlier this year hit customers with a 2.5-percent rate increase to help pay for the \$100-million project.

“(That project) is moving faster than we anticipated. We’re just facing a challenging budget this year and we really don’t need any pressure from VRSD thinking we should be paying more overhead,” Orkney said.

“We’re trying to hold the line for our ratepayers, that’s it. We’re just trying to make sure that anything we’re asked to pay for is justifiable,” she said.



# LVMWD touts water quality

By [The Acorn Staff](#) | on June 27, 2018

Las Virgenes Municipal Water District has released and mailed its 2017 Water Quality Report to homes and businesses throughout the district's 122-square-mile service area.

LVMWD says the annual publication of test results reflects water quality analyses conducted throughout 2017 and shows that the district's customers continue to receive excellent quality drinking water.

State and federal law require that all water districts throughout California consistently provide updated test results of their drinking water supply to customers.

"We're aware that some vendors are trying to sell supplemental home treatment systems by disparaging the quality of tap water, but LVMWD customers can enjoy water straight from the tap with every assurance that it's not just safe but refreshing," LVMWD general manager David Pedersen said.

The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California and LVMWD personnel perform water quality tests at numerous locations in the service area throughout the year.

This year's  
**Water Quality Report**

is on its way to  
your home or business

Once again, LVMWD Customers can be assured they receive high quality tap water that meets or surpasses all state and federal water quality standards.

Be sure to read the mailed report, view it online at [LVMWD.com/WQR](http://LVMWD.com/WQR) or request a copy by calling Customer Service at 818-251-2200 during business hours.

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## Harbor water brown but safe

It lacks oxygen in areas, say Oxnard officials

Wendy Leung USA TODAY NETWORK  
Ventura County Star 6/28/2018

The water at Channel Islands Harbor is brown but it's definitely safe, according to city of Oxnard officials.

Results from samples taken at the harbor last week to determine bacteria levels showed the water is not hazardous to human health. However, Assistant Public Works Director Thien Ng said Tuesday that water in some areas of the harbor lacks oxygen, and that's a cause for concern.

"You can look down at the water and you know that something is not healthy," Ng said. "I can tell something is not normal here."

Residents in the area first started noticing brown water at the harbor at the beginning of last week. Some said there is a foul odor and that there are dead fish in the water.

Ng said the city's public works staff has not seen evidence of dying marine life but that it wouldn't be a surprise.

"When you have those types of concentration of dissolved oxygen, when you don't do something quickly, I wouldn't be surprised if we see some of that," Ng said.

Since the city first learned about the water issue, public works staff members have visited the harbor daily and taken water samples at 26 sites. The city has been in contact with a local manufacturer of aeration diffusers to discuss a plan for installing the devices for water circulation.

Ng said until it is determined how many of these devices are needed and where they should be installed, the city plans to purchase a few in the coming days to see if they help.

The main theory behind the cause of the brown water is that a nearby power plant has ceased operations.

The Mandalay Generating Station, which stopped production in February, had run water pumps that circulated water in the canal leading to the harbor.

"Staff couldn't say there's no connection because by shutting down those big recirculation pumps, it slowed down the recirculation rate for the harbor area," Ng said.

The city has ruled out that agricultural runoff is causing the brown water. Ng said more information can be gleaned from a marine biologist.

"We still recommend that the city consider bringing in a marine biologist to look into taking nutrient samples, especially in troubled areas with low oxygen, to basically investigate and get more details," Ng said.

Councilman Bert Perello said he reached out to county Supervisor John Zaragoza about the problem in the hopes the city and county could pool resources to solve the issue.

Perello also asked the city staff to share all data from the water test results with the public.

Ng said the staff is working on a website to share information specific to the water-quality issues at the harbor. He said the site will likely have testing data plotted on a harbor map.

To report any water issues at the Channel Islands Harbor, call the city's hotline at 805-797-7598.



**Oxnard Public Works Director Rosemarie Gaglione takes a water sample from the Channel Islands Harbor last week. COURTESY PHOTOS**



**Oxnard Mayor Tim Flynn, right, and interim City Manager Scott Whitney look at a map of the harbor during a boat trip to collect water samples.**

## Dead trees stack up

115,000 more reported in Ventura County in 2017

Cheri Carlson USA TODAY NETWORK

Ventura County Star 6/24/2018

More than 129 million trees died as California's drought dragged on for years, but those numbers may be starting to level off in some parts of the state. h That is, at least for now. h Shortchanged on water and nutrients, more and more trees became vulnerable to insect attacks and died. h

A 2016 aerial survey reported 260,000 more dead trees in Los Padres National Forest. Then the area got above-normal rainfall for the first time in years.



**“Trees aren’t getting moisture that they need.”**

**Susan Kocher Natural resources adviser**

**This photo from 2015 shows drought stressed trees in Los Padres National Forest.  
STAR FILE PHOTO**

In 2017, the survey reported far fewer dead trees – an estimated 152,000 in all of Los Padres and 115,000 in Ventura County.

“We’re still in an ongoing drought,” said Greg Thompson, forester in Los Padres. “We won’t find out until later on this summer whether activity has picked up this year.”

Locally, areas near Frazier Park and Lockwood Valley have been hit hardest. Figueroa Mountain in Santa Barbara County also had big losses.

State and federal officials have called California's tree die-off unprecedented — one that increases the risk of wildfire and has prompted calls for changes to managing forests.

### **Since 2010, 129 million trees have died**

Statewide, the U.S. Forest Service estimates 129 million trees have died since 2010. Last year, an aerial survey found roughly 27 million more dead trees since the 2016 flights.

Most of those were in the Sierra Nevada range from Kern to El Dorado counties.

“Up in the Sierras, there are some stands where there are no trees left,” Thompson said.

Even in Los Padres, Jeffrey pines still showed increased mortality in 2017. Surveys found an estimated 36,000 dead trees in 2016 and 120,000 in 2017.

“Trees aren't getting moisture that they need to be healthy and they're stressed,” said Susan Kocher, a natural resources adviser for UC Cooperative Extension. “We had a huge insect outbreak because of the drought.”

Kocher, based in South Lake Tahoe, focuses on the Central Sierra, where stands of ponderosa pines were hit hard by beetle attacks.

Under normal conditions, some insects can help the health of the forest. They attack overly mature, diseased, dying trees. Meanwhile, the healthier trees can fight off attacks.

During the drought, however, more and more trees became too stressed to do so.

The highest risk of fire is when trees still have their needles – the so-called “red and dead” phase, Kocher said.

Green needles turn red, and those dried-out needles are a particularly flashy fuel, like tinder in a campfire. Once the needles fall off, the risk drops a bit.

But when those dead trees eventually fall down, they'll end up creating piles of dry logs on the forest floor. In a wildfire, those burn hotter and longer.

“It's not something we've typically experienced in the past,” Kocher said.

### **Not enough resources to remove all dead trees**

With such a huge die-off, there are not enough resources to get dead trees out of the woods, she said. The focus has been getting them out of areas where they pose an immediate threat to people.

In Los Padres, removal efforts have focused on areas near trails, campgrounds and roads, Thompson said. That work has picked up as the drought dragged on.

The forest also has proposed thinning projects to reduce the number of trees competing for the same resources.

“If it kills the whole stand, there’s not much you can do,” Thompson said. “But if there are green trees standing, that’s where you are going to be most effective.”

Different species get hit by different bugs, which boom and bust at different times. While mortality among Jeffrey pines went up in 2017, it declined among white firs, Coulter pines and oaks, according to the survey. Forest officials urged hikers and campers to be aware of their surroundings and that trees can fall without warning. For more tips, go to [https:// www.fs.fed.us/visit/know-before-yougo/ hazard-trees](https://www.fs.fed.us/visit/know-before-yougo/hazard-trees).

## LETTERS



BRIAN VAN DER BRUG Los Angeles Times

**WATER CASCADES** down a hill at the terminus of the Los Angeles Aqueduct in Sylmar.

### ‘Take it back’

Re “Splitting our water,” Opinion, June 21

Barton H. Thompson and Matt Kline raise a number of questions regarding water resources if the initiative to divide California into three separate states passes.

Specifically, they raise concerns about the rights to water from two major projects — the Colorado River Project and the State Water Project — that are critical sources of supply to Southern California in general and Los Angeles County specifically. Neither project would be located in the proposed new state of California, which would include L.A. County. Endless and expensive litigation would ensue.

The article did not address yet another imported water project that benefits the city of Los Angeles: the Los Angeles Aqueduct.

The eastern Sierra Nevada source of this water is in the proposed state of Southern California, which contains Inyo and Mono counties. For this reason alone, it shouldn’t come as a surprise if the measure were to pass in those two counties.

And in the unlikely event that it would pass statewide, Los Angeles, to paraphrase William Mulholland, might be forced to say, “Here it is, take it back.”

DAN MASNADA  
Valencia

The writer was general manager of the Castaic Lake Water Agency from 2002 to 2016.



## Harbor's water turns brown over past week

### Oxnard officials taking samples to find cause

Wendy Leung USA TODAY NETWORK  
Ventura County Star 6/23/2018

Oxnard officials are trying to find out why the water at Channel Islands Harbor has turned brown in the past week.

Residents near the harbor noticed the water turning cloudy and muddy at the start of the week. Some wonder whether it has anything to do with a nearby power plant closing down.

To get some answers, staff members from the Oxnard Public Works Department have been taking water samples at different times of day and different areas of the harbor. Results from laboratory tests won't arrive until next week.

Public Works Director Rosemarie Gaglione said there appears to be algae bloom in the water, but results from the tests will provide a clearer picture.

"This is not something we're taking lightly," Gaglione said.

In February, the nearby Mandalay Generating Station, a power plant owned by NRG Energy Inc., ceased operations because it did not obtain a contract with Southern California Edison.

The power plant used ocean water to cool operations and the facility's pumps had circulated the water. Residents believe the brown water is a result of the power plant pumps no longer being in operation.

NRG spokesman David Knox did not answer questions about water quality but confirmed the power plant was retired on Feb. 5.

"The site remains in an environmentally and physically safe status, in compliance with its permits and regulations," according to Knox. "By permit, the circulating pumps that pulled water out of the canal can only run to support power generation and maintenance activities and we have ceased those permitted operations."

City officials are not ruling out that the closure of the power plant caused the problem.

"It's likely there's a group of contributors," Gaglione said. "We don't know for sure but we want to know."

The testing of the water samples will show whether there are bacteria and forms of nitrates in the water. Gaglione said the water at the harbor looks brown but the water samples poured into glass bottles look clear.

"We did not encounter any strong odors," she said. "We did not see any dead fish."

Bill Wilson, who has lived at the harbor for nearly three decades, is concerned about the water quality like many of his neighbors. The July Fourth holiday is near and many residents host parties and children jump into the water.

Wilson said he has never seen the water turn this color before.

“We don’t know for a fact that it’s a lack of pumping, but it appears to be a brand-new problem,” Wilson said. “It’s the only change that I’m aware of.”

The city has established a hotline at 805-797-7598 for residents to report any odor or discoloration of water at the harbor.



**Oxnard Public Works Director Rosemarie Gaglione takes a water sample from the Channel Islands Harbor on Thursday. COURTESY**

## Sativa water official is placed on suspension Water district suspends general manager

General manager on leave over allegations agency hired people to attend town hall.



**FOR MORE than a year, residents of Compton and Willowbrook have complained of discolored water from the Sativa Los Angeles County Water District. (Luis Sinco Los Angeles Times)**

By Adam Elmahrek, Ruben Vives and Angel Jennings  
LA Times 6/23/2018

The general manager of a small public agency under fire for delivering brown, smelly water to parts of Compton and Willowbrook has been placed on administrative leave effective immediately, the water district board's attorney announced this week.

Maria Rachele Garza's suspension came days after The Times reported allegations that the embattled Sativa Los Angeles County Water District hired people to pose as supporters and attend a congresswoman's town hall regarding complaints of dirty water.

Garza could not be reached for comment. In previous interviews with The Times, she strongly denied knowing anything about hiring people to attend the forum.

After the town hall, the water district issued a statement denying that it paid people to attend the forum and support the district. However, water board President Luis

Landeros told The Times on Thursday that the statement was not authorized by the board.

Sativa's board of directors held a special closed-door meeting Thursday and afterward announced Garza was placed on leave with pay pending the outcome of an investigation into the allegations, said Eduardo Olivo, the board's attorney. Olivo, who will be conducting the inquiry, said Garza makes about \$77,000 annually.

Cole Edwards said in an interview with The Times before the meeting that Sativa hired him to place a Craigslist ad and find paid supporters. The Times reviewed text messages and emails he said he exchanged with Garza, along with a list of questions supporters were to ask at the forum. He said the plan was to hide the water district's involvement.

Edwards said he didn't believe the plan was right and thought it should be exposed, so he contacted The Times.

Rep. Nanette Diaz Barragán started the town hall by suggesting that some in the audience had been paid to pose as residents supporting the district, although she did not say who she believed was behind the paid protesters or accuse anyone specifically. She asked anyone who was paid not to participate.

In a video of the forum posted on the congresswoman's Facebook page, a man who later identified himself to The Times as Kelvin Smith read from a notebook and asked three questions.

The material Edwards provided to The Times before the meeting listed those same three questions, in the same order, and stated that they were assigned to be asked by a "Kelvin Smith."

Event organizer Kathrina Abrot said in a prior interview that she worked with Garza, whom she identified as her cousin, and Edwards to hire canvassers tasked with finding people to attend the town hall. Abrot said she didn't know if canvassers spoke at the meeting but that they did not pay people to do so.

Garza denied knowing either Edwards or Abrot.

County supervisors Mark Ridley-Thomas and Janice Hahn, who voted in her capacity at another agency to dissolve Sativa, condemned the water district.

Ridley-Thomas said in a statement that "if Sativa is indeed attempting to muddy the facts, it would not only be unethical but also unconscionable. Public health — not political maneuvering — should prevail."

Hahn said Sativa's goal to "drown out legitimate concerns with paid protesters" is "deplorable behavior and only adds insult to injury."

Sativa — a tiny agency that serves water to just over 1,600 ratepayers in Compton and Willowbrook — has faced years of complaints from consumers and survived earlier

attempts to disband it. The Times in 2013 reported allegations of poor financial oversight and mismanagement at the district, including that the board members had awarded themselves bereavement pay and Christmas bonuses not allowed under state law.

The water quality issue is the most serious challenge yet. Residents have been complaining about discolored water for more than a year.

County officials say the brown water is safe to drink but contains higher than normal levels of manganese. They said the problem comes from aging pipes, and that the district occasionally flushes out sediment that builds up in the system. The pipes need to be replaced in a multimillion-dollar infrastructure project, according to Garza.

A county governing agency voted last week to begin the process of disbanding Sativa. A hearing on the issue is scheduled in July.

Hahn said ousting the general manager would not be enough to ensure the district's survival.

"They have been given enough chances. It is clear that this district was mismanaged but the problems go far beyond leadership issues," she said.



GENARO MOLINA Los Angeles Times

**THE SATIVA** Los Angeles County Water District put general manager Maria Rachelle Garza, right, on paid leave Thursday. The agency is investigating allegations that she hired people to pose as supporters at a congresswoman's town hall. She has denied the allegations.