

# NEWS CLIPS

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**Resource Conservation and Public Outreach**

Organized by date

## Workers discover part of L.A.'s first municipal water system

*A 100-foot section of the Mother Ditch, or Zanja Madre, which carried water from the Los Angeles River to the young city, is found by workers excavating a site in Chinatown.*



By Bob Pool  
LA Times April 21, 2014

Workers excavating the site of a \$100-million Chinatown development have discovered a 100-foot section of Los Angeles' first municipal water system, an ancient maze of brick and wooden pipes and conduits that once fed the city.

The 4-foot-diameter brick pipe that was found beneath what once was Little Joe's restaurant is part of the so-called Mother Ditch, or Zanja Madre, that carried water from the Los Angeles River to the young city, its channels twisting and bending along a 90-mile network.

The antiquity was uncovered April 10 as workers were beginning construction on the Blossom Plaza, a five-story mixed-use apartment and storefront project on North Broadway. About 73 feet of the Mother Ditch have been exposed at the project site.

When first created in 1781, the Zanja Madre was an open ditch fed by a small dam built in the river, the city's main water source at the time.

Decades later, a 40-foot water wheel was constructed to increase the ditch's gravitational flow to a brick reservoir near Olvera Street. From there the network of pipes fanned out, carrying water to homes and to fields for irrigation.

Worried about public health, officials enclosed the Zanja Madre in 1877. It was finally abandoned in 1904.

Bits and pieces of the old water system have surfaced over the years. In 2005, workers constructing the Gold Line trolley extension came across a section of the Zanja Madre. About 75 feet of the uncovered pipe remain visible next to the trolley line and Broadway.

Other remnants can be seen in the basement of Olvera Street's 1818 Avila Adobe and along Figueroa Street, where a 3-foot-deep concrete "Sister Zanja" runs a short distance outside St. Vincent's Catholic Church near the corner of Figueroa and West Adams Boulevard.

A spur of the Zanja Madre also provided water that powered the millstone at the 1881 Capitol Milling Co. plant on Spring Street. The flour mill closed in the early 1990s.

City Councilman Gilbert Cedillo, who represents the Chinatown area, said a 40-foot section of the Zanja Madre will be removed Saturday from the Blossom Plaza site and preserved for future display. The plan is to exhibit sections of the Mother Ditch at the Blossom Plaza, the Los Angeles Historic State Park and at Metabolic Studios' planned Los Angeles River Water Wheel replica project, he said.

Cedillo said the preservation of the Zanja Madre section is significant because it "served as the lifeline to the survival and early development of Los Angeles."

He praised Blossom Plaza's developer, [Forest City Enterprises](#), for taking pains to hire an archaeologist to monitor the excavation work and cited the willingness of Lauren Bon of Metabolic Studios to finance the Zanja Madre's excavation.

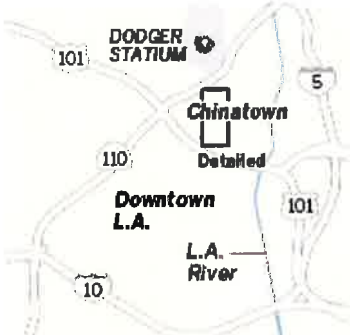
Archaeologist Lynn Furnis, on-site monitor with the Orange-based Cogstone Resource Management Inc., was quick to identify the brick pipe as being part of the Zanja system and immediately notified city officials, Cedillo said.

Sherri Gust, an archaeologist and Cogstone company principal, said experts had been searching for the Zanja Madre since the project's start. "We made a map of where we thought it might be and that's where it was," she said. It was about 12 feet beneath the site's surface.

Workers will use a vacuum to remove sediment from the brick Zanja Madre and carefully lift it out of the ground with a crane before taking it by flatbed truck to the river site where Bon's waterwheel project is being planned.

Nate Arnold, senior construction project manager with Forest City Enterprises, said a way will be found to integrate a portion of the Mother Ditch in Blossom Plaza's planned cultural center.

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Sources: Water and Power Associates, Google Maps

Los Angeles Times

<http://www.latimes.com/local/la-me-mother-ditch-20140422,0,2126852.story#ixzz30PExv1J6>

## Drought -- and neighbors -- press Las Vegas to conserve water

*Lake Mead, the reservoir that supplies 90% of Las Vegas' water, is ebbing as though a plug had been pulled from a bathtub drain.*



CAPTIONS

1/6

By John M. Glionna  
*LA Times April 20, 2014*

**LAS VEGAS** — Deep beneath Lake Mead, a 23-foot-tall tunnel-boring machine grinds through stubborn bedrock in a billion-dollar effort to make sure water continues flowing to this thirsty resort city.

For six years, the Southern Nevada Water Authority has been building an intake straw below the reservoir's two existing pipes. Due for completion in fall 2015, critics say it may not provide a long-term solution.

An ongoing drought and the Colorado River's stunted flow have shrunk Lake Mead to its lowest level in generations. The reservoir, which supplies 90% of Las Vegas' water, is

ebbing as though a plug had been pulled from a bathtub drain. By mid-April, Lake Mead's water level measured just 48 feet above the system's topmost intake straw.

- Also

Future droughts and a warming climate change could spell trouble for the city's 2 million residents — and its 40 million annual visitors. Those people "better hope nothing goes wrong with the last intake," said water authority spokesman J.C. Davis.

"But if something does go wrong," he added, "we're in the business of making contingency plans."

For officials here, the scenario signifies a formidable job: providing water for the nation's driest city. Las Vegas uses more water per capita than most communities in America — 219 gallons of water per person every day — and charges less for it than many communities.

Summer temperatures top 115 degrees in a scorched environment that in a banner year receives a paltry four inches of rain. The inhospitable conditions have pushed officials to develop water conservation programs considered models worldwide.

Although this spring's snowmelt could temporarily replenish Lake Mead, the city's future still looks drier than ever, a prospect that has prompted the water authority to eye such long-term plans as a desalinization plant in California and a \$15-billion pipeline to move water here from other parts of the state.

Environmentalists blast the proposed pipeline from central Nevada as irresponsible, calling it a resource grab comparable to William Mulholland's move that created an aqueduct to transport water south from California's Owens Valley to help expand Los Angeles a century ago.

They say the city has been cavalier about looming water shortages, pointing to projects such as Lake Las Vegas, a 320-acre artificial oasis built with man-made rivers and waterfalls amid the high-end homes and luxury resorts.

But water use — and how to curtail it — poses a complex puzzle, officials say. Take the casinos.

John Entsminger, the water authority's new general manager, says such seemingly careless spectacles as the elaborate fountains at the Bellagio resort feature recycled water. "The Strip uses only 3% of the region's water but supplies 70% of its economy," he said. "That's not a bad bargain."

Officials say they have prepared for myriad possible scenarios, including an emergency slashing of Las Vegas' annual water allotment. "It's important to remember that this

would happen over a period of years, not months and not weeks," Davis said of such a cutback. "You don't wake up one morning and ask, 'Where did all the water go?'"

Still, water officials here acknowledge that their challenge is to keep Las Vegas livable while reining in several older neighborhoods that have resisted taking out lawns and other conservation measures. The authority has already achieved a remarkable feat: In recent years, Las Vegas and its suburbs have cut water use by one-third while adding 400,000 residents.

It was done in part with a \$200-million fund to provide rebates for replacing grass with desert landscapes. Las Vegas also recycles all water that goes down the drain from dishwashers, sinks, showers and even toilets, and after reprocessing, it is pumped back into Lake Mead. With each gallon returned to the reservoir, the city gets to take another out.

The water authority plans to cut per-capita water use even further to 199 gallons a day by 2035, a rate still higher than California's present average of 182 gallons.

The Colorado River provides water for 40 million people across the Southwest — the majority of them in cities such as Las Vegas. The region's population is expected to almost double by 2060. In that time, Las Vegas will gain 1 million residents, forecasters say.

Many water experts say Las Vegas needs to immediately take a series of no-nonsense steps to help control its water shortage: Cut indoor as well as outdoor use; charge much more for water and punish abusers with precipitously higher rates; and start disclosing the rate of a neighbor's water use in residential bills to create more social pressure to conserve.

"At some point, you have to live within your means, but that doesn't fit with the image of Las Vegas," said Steve Erickson, Utah coordinator for the Great Basin Water Network, an advocacy group. "These people need to remember that it's a city built upon an inhospitable desert. What were they thinking?"

When it comes to water, this city has long been at a disadvantage: A 1922 Colorado River water-sharing agreement among seven Western states — one still in effect nearly a century later — gives Southern Nevada the smallest allotment of all: just 300,000 acre-feet a year. An acre-foot can supply two average homes for one year.

Worse, unlike such cities as Phoenix and Los Angeles, Las Vegas has just one major water source — Lake Mead — putting it most at risk during a prolonged drought and dwindling lake water reserves. The city receives a scant 10% of its water from underground local aquifers.

Officials say Las Vegas uses only 80% of its Colorado River allotment and is banking the rest for the future. But critics say that even if the city taps all of its entitled water, that

amount would still not be enough to meet its needs in a prolonged drought. And after years of recession, building is starting to come back here, leaving many to ask: Where are all these new residents going to get their water?

"How foolish can you be? It's the same fatal error being repeated all over the Southwest — there is no new water," said Tim Barnett, a marine physicist at UC San Diego's Scripps Institution of Oceanography and coauthor of two reports about dwindling Western water resources. His research concluded that without massive cutbacks in water use, Lake Mead had a 50% chance of deteriorating to "dead pool" by 2036. That's the level at which the reservoir's surface drops beneath Las Vegas' lowest water intake.

Yet casinos and developers continue to push growth, and critics say lawmakers often seem to lack the willpower to draw the line. "Will Las Vegas remain a boom town in the 21st century? The city wants to appear confident but it's a place built on illusion and luck," said Emily Green, an environmental journalist who writes about water issues on her blog, [Chance of Rain](#).

"When it comes to water," she added, "those aren't very good guiding principles."

The real water hog is not people, many say, but grass: About 70% of Las Vegas water goes to lawns, public parks and golf courses. A rebate program has already ripped out 168 million square feet of grass, enough to lay an 18-inch-wide roll of sod about 85% of the way around the Earth.

But is Las Vegas ready to ban grass entirely? "Well, at that point you're seriously impacting quality of life. We're not being complacent. We're just not ready for draconian cuts," said Davis, the spokesman for the water authority.

Barnett argues that's precisely the wake-up call people need. "All these people assume this water thing will just work itself out. Well, suppose we're looking at a change in our basic climate, where scarce water is only going to get more scarce. That's the alternative you need to plan for — and no one's doing it."

Many ask why Las Vegas continues to allow projects such as Lake Las Vegas. The lake is filled with 3 billion gallons of Colorado River water, enough to supply 18,000 residences for a year. And 1.4 billion gallons must be added annually to stop the lake from receding.

Davis said the project was conceived well before the current water crisis. "Would we build another man-made lake today? Clearly not. But stop supplying water there and values will plummet. How many lawsuits do you want to wade through regarding people's quality of life?"

The water authority is pushing forward with a plan for a 300-mile pipeline to import water from the state's agricultural heartland. The project has touched off such old



Nevada grudges as north versus south and claims about urbanites enriching themselves as the expense of rural dwellers.

Environmentalists are challenging in court the right-of-way permits already secured by the water authority, and are promising a long legal battle.

Entsminger, the head of the water authority, believes the American Southwest must fight its water crisis together. He said the seven states drawing water from the Colorado River collectively form the world's fifth-largest economy — just behind Germany but ahead of France and Britain.

Southern Nevada, he insists, will do its part. And a big part of that, he said, will mean turning off the lawn sprinklers. He acknowledged he's a culprit.

His front yard features a small patch of ornamental grass planted by the previous homeowners. "I know I should take it out," the water czar said with a grimace. "It's on my list."

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# Wetter spring may ease upper Midwest drought

*Iowa, Minn., S. Dakota expect more rainfall*

By Nora Hertel Associated Press  
Ventura County Star 4/20/2014

PIERRE, S.D. — A spring forecast of above-average rainfall in parts of the Plains region is raising hopes for a break in drought conditions plaguing much of the area.

“It looks pretty good for conditions to improve into the early summer,” said Sioux Falls-based National Weather Service hydrologist Mike Gillispie about predictions for precipitation in parts of Iowa, Minnesota and South Dakota.

Brian Fuchs, a climatologist with the National Drought Mitigation Center in Lincoln, Neb., also expects extra precipitation through April in the Central and Northern Plains.

But while some drought relief might be on the way, representatives from the agriculture industry and municipal water departments are still wary.

Nathan Fields, with National Corn Growers Association, said the 2012 drought showed how quickly it can set in and damage crop production.

Parts of Eastern South Dakota are abnormally dry, and the stretch from Southern Minnesota and Iowa through Nebraska is in moderate drought, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. North Dakota, meanwhile, largely has escaped drought conditions.

Conditions worsen farther south, with parts of Texas and Oklahoma suffering through a severe and persistent drought.

Fields, the association’s director of biotechnology and economic analysis, said the weather “is the biggest variable that nobody really has control over.”

He said once a drought settles in, all farmers can do is hope they selected a drought-resistant seed.

Jason Kontz farms corn, soybeans and alfalfa on 2,500 acres near Coleman, S.D. In dry times, Kontz said, “we just plant and hope for rain or try and put the seed deep enough to reach moisture in the soil.”

Kontz said conditions in the southeastern corner of the state are not too bad, but it feels dry.

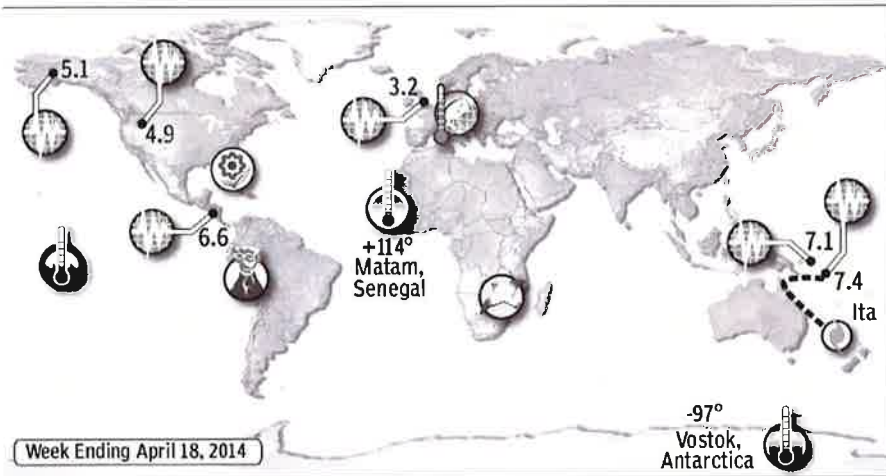
“I think it’s going to be dry this spring,” the 35-year-old farmer said.

Jerry Obrist, chief engineer for water works in Lincoln, Neb., has been monitoring drought conditions as well. In Nebraska exceptionally dry weather affects aquifers that provide water across the state. Drought severity varies across Nebraska, and Obrist said precipitation has been below average this year.

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# Science & Environment

THE STAR « Sunday, April 20, 2014



## El Niño



Weeks of speculation by various weather agencies about a possible re-emergence of El Niño later this year have led Australia's Bureau of Meteorology to predict that there is now a more than 70 percent chance of the ocean warming's return. That country is especially vulnerable to weather shifts from the phenomenon, which typically returns about every three to seven years. El Niño usually brings drier-than-normal conditions to Australia, now suffering from a drought in the northeast that has forced ranchers to cull cows. The U.S. agency NOAA estimates the chance of El Niño expanding across the tropical Pacific during the Northern Hemisphere's summer at about 50 percent. During the worst El Niño on record in 1997-98, the warming brought devastating storms to California and costly drought to southern parts of the U.S.

JIM MACDONALD

EYE ON THE ENVIRONMENT

## 12-step program for water reuse

Ventura County Star 4/20/2014

On Jan. 17, Gov. Brown declared “we can’t make it rain, but we can be better prepared for the terrible consequences” of California’s current drought.

What can we do? Well, for one, we can use the water coming from our clothes washers, which is usually just sent down the drain, to irrigate our flower beds and shrubs. And when it rains, we can capture and keep rainwater for irrigation. Together, gray water and rainwater may significantly reduce, or even eliminate, the amount of potable water used for residential irrigation .

Repurposing gray water and capturing rainwater are good for the water bill and the environment. With each load of laundry, a homeowner can reduce demand for water and ease the drought’s effects.

Some may consider just running a garden hose from the clothes washer and out the window to lawns and flower beds. While that may seem harmless, it presents potential dangers most are not aware of.

Gray water allowed to accumulate on the ground surface puts pets, children and the public at risk of harmful bacterial contact. Gray water also can contaminate low-to-the-ground vegetables, such as carrots and strawberries. It is safe, however, to use gray water for citrus and avocado trees, if done correctly.

State regulations now allow for limited collection and use of rainwater for residential irrigation. Like with laundry graywater disposal, a small rainwater collection system can be installed without a plumbing permit, if some basic common-sense rules are followed. Details on rainwater capturing will be available during summer workshops.

The Ventura County Building and Safety Division has a standard plan for a safe and sanitary laundry gray water disposal system. Remember that such a system is allowed only on a property with a single-family home. By following 12 simple rules outlined in the plan, it can be installed without too much difficulty.

The building division also has demonstration walls that show what a gray water system should look like when completed. The walls are used during gray water workshops to provide a visual example. Keep an eye out for these walls because they are moved throughout the county to various city halls and other public spaces to spread the word about reusing laundry water for irrigation.

The Building and Safety Division will host a series of workshops for homeowners wanting to install a gray water system. The workshops will feature hands-on demonstrations of materials needed for a system .

Visit [http://www.ventura.org/rma/build\\_safe/index.htm](http://www.ventura.org/rma/build_safe/index.htm) for more workshop information. To register, email Marie. Becerra@Ventura.org or call 654-2795.

If you decide to install a system, remember to use biodegradable soaps and no harsh chemicals in your laundry. Also, if you wash anything with grease, blood, urine or feces on it, be sure to divert that gray water to the sewage system, where it can be properly treated. Perform regular cleaning and maintenance on your system to keep it working properly.

By correctly installing and maintaining your gray water system, you will be keeping an eye on the environment.

Jim MacDonald is director of the Ventura County Building and Safety Division. He can be reached at 654-2787 or Jim. MacDonald@Ventura.org. Representatives of government or nonprofit agencies who want to submit articles on environmental topics for this column should contact David Goldstein at 658-4312 or [david.goldstein@ventura.org](mailto:david.goldstein@ventura.org).

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## State Water Project to make small deliveries this year

*Thanks to Northern California storms, the system's allocation will increase to 5% from the historic zero announced in January.*



Storms in Northern California will allow the State Water Project to make small deliveries to some customers. (Victor J. Blue/Bloomberg / April 21, 2014)

By Bettina Boxall  
LA Times April 18, 2014

The State Water Project, which helps supply a majority of Californians, will make small deliveries this year, officials said Friday as they increased the system's allocation to 5% from the historic zero announced in January.

February and March storms in Northern California raised the levels of the state's two largest reservoirs enough to allow federal water managers to also significantly boost deliveries to wildlife refuges and irrigation districts with the most senior water rights in the Sacramento Valley.

"This is all a bit of good news in an otherwise very bleak water year," state water resources director Mark Cowin said.

The changes won't make much of a difference for most Californians. At 5%, the state allocation is still the lowest on record for urban agencies, which continue to emphasize the need for conservation.

"Metropolitan was fortunate to enter this drought with sizable water reserves," said Jeffrey Kightlinger, general manager of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, the state project's biggest customer. "But those reserves are slowly dropping. ... Lowering demand is the one thing each and every one of us can do to ensure that our reserves will be sufficient to withstand a drought that has no end in sight."

The allocation for most growers supplied by the Central Valley Project remains at zero. Officials of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, which operates the project, were not optimistic that would change. They did indicate, however, that the allocation for wildlife refuges and senior rights holders in the San Joaquin Valley, now at 40%, might go up a bit.

California growers are expected to idle at least 500,000 acres of cropland this year for lack of irrigation. But the majority of the state's roughly 8 million acres of irrigated farmland will still be planted.

Farmers are pumping groundwater, buying water from districts with senior rights and, in some cases, have supplies left from last year. The huge Imperial Irrigation District in southeast California is also getting its normal deliveries from the Colorado River.

In the Sacramento Valley, deliveries will be timed to improve conditions for spawning winter-run Chinook salmon, which are facing dangerously warm river temperatures because of the drought.

The valley's senior rights holders, known as the Settlement Contractors, have agreed to delay many of their plantings — and thus their Sacramento River diversions — until after May 1. That will allow the reclamation bureau to hold more cold water behind upstream Shasta Dam and release it for the growers when the salmon most need it.

"The Sacramento River Settlement Contractors have made a significant contribution to conserving winter-run Chinook salmon," said Maria Rea, assistant regional administrator of [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries](#).

The group, which had been facing a record low allocation of 40%, will now get 75% of its usual supply, as will Sacramento Valley wildlife refuges.

Fish and wildlife officials said it was particularly important that the refuges receive water this year because wet conditions in Canada are expected to produce a bumper crop of waterfowl that will head to the Central Valley for the winter.

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<http://www.latimes.com/science/la-me-water-allocation-20140419,0,1601633.story#ixzz30PEF0pEj>



# Smart water meters in Oak Park

By Sylvie Belmond  
The Acorn 4/17/2014

Smart water meters will be coming to **Oak Park** soon.

Triunfo Sanitation District officials voted to obtain a \$ 2.5- million loan to begin installation of automated water meters at homes and businesses throughout the community, in spite of the fact that the district's potable water subsidiary, **Oak Park Water Service**, is facing low fiscal reserves.

Total reserves for Triunfo Sanitation District (TSD) are estimated at \$8 million, but the projected balance in **Oak Park's** reserve fund is only \$558,000, all of which is dedicated to repaying a loan for a water tank that was built last year.

"Our meters are at the end of their useful life and not giving accurate readings. I don't disagree with doing it (buying and installing the automated meters) but I'm not sure this is the right time for it," Triunfo board director Mike McReynolds said.

"We don't have the minimum reserves that we should have, and we should be considering whether we should fix other parts of the water system first to maintain reliability of potable water delivery," McReynolds said.

Board chair Steven Iceland said about three-fourths of the analog meters are faulty and replacing them with new devices that provide accurate readings is in the ratepayers' best interest.

"We need new meters anyway," Iceland said. "McReynolds is right, this is not good timing. But by going to automated meter readers, we can not only update our meters for reliability but also save the cost of having the meter readers go out every month. The new meters will reflect better all the water we're selling."

Last year, **Oak Park Water Service** had to spend \$400,000 from its reserves to replace a metering station owned by Calleguas Municipal Water District.

In an emergency, **Oak Park Water** could borrow money from Triunfo's reserve, according to water district officials.

Bartle Wells Associates, a financial advisory firm, helped Triunfo obtain a 15-year loan with Banc of America Public Capital Corp. at a 3.2 percent interest rate.

Although costly, the conversion from analog meters to automated devices that digitally transmit information about customer water use to the district's headquarters will pay off in the future, officials said.

Based on the latest calculation, Oak Park Water could lose an estimated 11 percent in revenue because aging meters don't accurately read low water flow.

"We are confident that we can capture at least half of that and recover approximately \$250,000 in annual revenue through the installation of the automated meter system," said Sandy Warren, spokesperson for the Ventura Regional Sanitation District, which manages operations for Triunfo.

The automated meters will also reduce labor costs, officials said. TSD spends about \$100,000 annually in meter-related activities.

"There will be some cost savings, but the primary benefits will be enhanced system reliability and the ability for customers to monitor their own water use online," Warren said.

TSD will repay its loan through semiannual installments of about \$107,000 each.

Installation of automated meters should be completed within a year. The new meters have a 20-year lifespan.

Over time, all potable and recycled water meters will be replaced with digital units.

"It may be that the board may have no choice but to raise rates in order to have reserves for emergencies," TSD director Janna Orkney said.

Letters

## Can't take water for granted

The Acorn 4/17/2014

Regarding "State's critical water issues discussed at April 3 summit in [Calabasas](#)" (April 10), climate change is a gamechanger, especially when it comes to water policy.

Our current drought may be the first of many that will become much more frequent as global warming worsens in the years ahead, according to most of the world's scientists.

We've got to stop taking water for granted. Anything we can do now—the Bay Delta Conservation Plan, water conservation, recycling—may help a lot in the future. This will be especially true if the public and our elected officials don't start taking climate change a lot more seriously.

Robert Girard

[Newbury Park](#)



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16A-REV

# California sees spurt in permitting

By Scott Smith Associated Press  
Ventura County Star 4/14/2014



Jorge Vargas, a foreman for Maggiora Brothers drilling inc., holds clay drilled while drilling an 800-foot-deep water well at an almond farm Friday in Chowchilla, Calif. Associated Press

CHOWCHILLA, Calif. - The scarcity of irrigation water in drought-stricken California has created such a demand for well drilling services that Central Valley farmer Bob Smittcamp is taking matters into his own hands.

He's buying a drilling rig for \$1 million to make certain he has enough water this summer for thousands of acres of fruit and vegetable crops.

'It's like an insurance policy,' said Smittcamp, who knows two other farmers doing the same thing. 'You have to do something to protect your investment.' With California in a third dry year, well drilling is booming across the nation's most productive agricultural region, and some drilling companies are booked for months or a year. In some counties, requests for permits to dig new wells have soared, more than doubling over this time last year.

Farmers expect to get only a fraction - if any - of the water they need from vast government-controlled systems of canals and reservoirs interlacing the state. In an effort to make up the difference, they are drilling hundreds of feet deep to tap underground water supplies.

Smittcamp said a licensed driller he often hires approached him, saying the demand for drillers is so high that Smittcamp needs his own full-scale drilling rig.

Smittcamp, whose Wawona Packing Co. farms thousands of acres, said he has written a \$150,000 check as a deposit and the rest is due upon delivery of the \$1 million rig, which he expects to happen soon.

He estimates that he spends \$4,000 an acre tending his peach and grape crops before the harvest. If a well were to run dry midseason with nobody to call, Smittcamp said he could lose that investment - and perhaps entire orchards or vineyards.

When the rig isn't being used on Smittcamp's land, he said the driller will put it to work on neighboring farms to recoup the investment.

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WANDA MOYER

EYE ON THE ENVIRONMENT

## Landscaping options help conserve water

Ventura County Star 4/13/2014

Up to 70 percent of typical household water use is outdoors, so reducing overwatering is often the easiest way to cut back on usage. Overwatering is a wasteful and expensive method to green your landscape.

Changing your gardening can save water and money on your utility bill, especially during the summer when days are longer and hotter. Your gardener, however, might not tell you about landscape maintenance options because he or she may not want to make changes that make the work less necessary on a weekly basis. For example, you might want your lawn to look a little less manicured and a little more green. Less frequent mowing or raising mower blades can help grass grow deeper roots and reduce watering needs.

You might be able to do without your gardener entirely if you remove turf and replace it with water conserving, slower-growing plants. In some areas of Ventura County, you can even earn \$1 per square foot to remove turf grass. Contact your water provider to see what financial incentives they offer.

You also might consider replacing other types of plants. Select climate-appropriate plants and match them with similar soil, sun and water needs. Visit <http://www.ventura.watersavingplants.com> for suggestions. This website is sponsored by local water agencies to promote water-wise plants that thrive in Ventura County.

Some landscape fixes may be regarded by gardeners as "Not my job." For example, sprinklers probably do not run while the gardener is present, and sprinkler controllers may not be in an accessible area. So you need to check your sprinkler system yourself for leaks, over spraying and broken irrigation heads. Ensure repairs are done correctly to prevent water waste.

Free irrigation surveys, provided by your water agency, are available in many areas for residents, businesses and homeowner associations. One item often suggested by these surveys is to irrigate near dawn or after dusk to minimize evaporation and wind interference. Many cities require that sprinklers operate early in the morning or in the evening, except for maintenance and repairs, to prevent water waste.

You can also customize watering schedules, based on ZIP code and weather, by using the free tools available at <http://www.bewaterwise.com>. Installation of a smart sprinkler controller that adjusts watering based on weather can save you water and money. Soil moisture sensor systems and certain types of sprinklers can help, too. You can retrofit

pop-up spray heads with rotating sprinkler nozzles for lawn and ground cover. Also, you can convert from spray watering to drip and bubblers for shrub and flower beds. Rebates for these devices are available in many areas. Attend a free California Friendly Landscape-Water Wise Gardening workshop. Classes are available in many areas. For schedules, visit <http://www.watershedwiseirrigating.com/classcalendar> and <http://www.cityofventura.net/water/landscape>. Visit your water provider's website for local water conservation programs and rebates.

The California Department of Water Resources has declared May as Water Awareness Month. Learn more about landscape water use by visiting the water conservation and landscape displays at the Simi Valley Street Fair and Emergency Expo on May 10, and the Simi Valley Public Works open house on May 22.

Everyone's help is needed to extend water reserves and enhance water-use efficiency. Keep your eye on the environment by choosing climate-appropriate plants and reducing irrigation.

On the Net: <http://www>.

[theodorepayne.org](http://theodorepayne.org); <http://www.socalwatersmart.com>; <http://www.simivalley.org/librarygardentour> Wanda Moyer is an environmental compliance coordinator for the city of Simi Valley and is responsible for coordinating the city's water conservation program. To submit articles on environmental topics for this column, contact David Goldstein at 658-4312 or david.

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S ANTA PAULA

## Groundwater issues will be discussed

Ventura County's strained groundwater supplies will be the topic of the annual symposium of the Association of Water Agencies of Ventura County on April 24.

The event, dubbed Overtapped Oasis, will feature keynote speaker Felicia Marcus, chair of the State Water Resources Control Board.

Groundwater supplies 60 percent of the county's total water use and is the sole supply for most of its \$2 billion-a-year agricultural industry, according to the association. About 450,000 west county residents also rely in part on groundwater for drinking supplies.

Policy experts and water leaders will discuss various issues and look at how other regions have handled crises.

The symposium is scheduled from 7 a. m. to 1:30 p.m. at the Courtyard by Marriott in Oxnard. Breakfast and lunch are included. Tickets are \$205 for association members and \$225 for nonmembers and are available at [www.awavc.org](http://www.awavc.org) or 64 4-0922.

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# Water tank still drawing criticism

*At meeting, Las Virgenes tension visible*

By Rachel McGrath Special to The Star  
Ventura County Star 4/12/2014

The fractured relationship between residents of Westlake Village and Las Virgenes Municipal Water District, and the deep divisions between the water district's directors, were on full display at a community meeting.

The district hosted the session Thursday at the First Neighborhood Community Center to explain the next phase of construction, including blasting, for a 5 million gallon water storage tank being built at Las Virgenes Reservoir above the city's Three Springs neighborhood.

At the start of the meeting, district board President Charles Caspary read a statement condemning verbal abuse and harassment district employees allegedly have faced as they have tried to work in the neighborhood.

'A few individuals who oppose the project have chosen to vent their opposition on district employees who have nothing to do with the decision made by the board. These personnel are simply trying to do their work,' Caspary said. 'All five members of the board of directors ask these individuals to immediately stop their harassment of district personnel.' The divided board voted 3-2 in January to approve the tank construction. On Thursday, board members Barry Steinhardt and Leonard Pollan, who cast the dissenting votes, traded barbs with Caspary over his actions as board president.

Steinhardt said not all of the board members approved the statement Caspary read.

'As far as harassment goes, I'm not aware of one incident that's been reported,' he said.

About two dozen residents from the neighborhood's 400-plus homes came to the meeting, which was also attended by Westlake Village Mayor Mark Rutherford and City Council members Brad Halpern and Philippa Klessig.

The purpose of the session was to allow engineering geologists to explain the blasting process that will take place over six weeks to create the base area for the tank.

However, residents continued to express their opposition to the project and safety fears.

They pressed the district on emergency plans in the event something went wrong during blasting and the dam broke. They also said they were afraid blasting would release spores from the soil that cause valley fever.

Thomas Blake, from Fugro West Inc., said there would be two blasts a day. The

explosives would be placed a couple of feet down, covered with rock and other materials, and the blasts would be small, he said. There also would be a system in place to monitor ground motion.

“By the time those vibrations get out into the community, they should be extremely small,” Blake said. “This kind of blasting is extremely common.”

District Manager David Pedersen said any emergency disaster response would be handled by first responders.

“This project is not going to cause such an event,” he said. “It’s not going to happen.”

Blake also said the blasting would not damage the dam.

“We’re chipping away at it with small explosions, so we know what’s going to happen,” Blake said. “That’s the reason we know it’s not going to be a problem.”

The district said 32 soil samples from the reservoir area were collected in November 2011 and tested by an expert at UC Davis. No DNA from coccidioides, the organism that causes valley fever, was detected in the samples.

District officials said appropriate measures are being taken to minimize dust from the construction site and they would consider what other steps could be taken to allay residents’ fears.

On the Net: Visit <http://www.lvmwd.com> and click on “construction” for more information about the project and a construction timeline.

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# Well pumping to face restrictions

*Area growers, cities must cut pumping 20%*

By Gretchen Wenner  
Ventura County Star 4/12/2014

On its third try, after drawing record crowds to recent meetings, the local board that regulates groundwater supplies passed emergency rules Friday to reduce pumping for farmers on the Oxnard Plain and by the cities of Oxnard, Ventura, Port Hueneme, Camarillo and Moorpark.

The ordinance means a 20 percent cutback in pumping from stressed groundwater basins, where recent drought conditions have exacerbated problems from decades of over drafting.

The reductions won't be immediate, and the method of achieving the 20 percent goal will differ for agricultural users and cities.

But the 5-0 vote of the Fox Canyon Groundwater Management Agency's board reflected growing acceptance in the ag community that action was necessary.

'This is something that had to be done,' Rob Roy, of the Ventura County Agricultural Association, told the board, which meets in the county supervisors' chambers in Ventura.

Since the Fox Canyon board held its last special meeting on the issue March 14, agency staff members had met with farmers on three Fridays for a total of 11 hours to come up with a new approach, Roy said. Every crop group was represented at the meetings.

The result of that effort was considered at Friday's special meeting. Fox Canyon staff previously had recommended across-the board phased cuts to reach the 20 percent goal. But growers complained those unfairly penalized farmers who had invested in efficient irrigation technology and those with permanent trees that can't be felled.

Friday's revised rules will mean a sea change for many growers in the agency's territory, which covers the Oxnard Plain and some inland acreage.

Now, all must report pumping activity based on crop types, growing conditions and weather. Currently, less than a quarter of farmers in the agency's boundaries do so. Most simply report pumping amounts based on historical usage.

The agency's existing index of efficient irrigation rates — an acre of lima beans in Camarillo in a wet year, for example, requires a third less water than blueberries with 70

percent ground shading during a typical rain year in Oxnard — will serve as the agency wide template for allowable pumping amounts.

Not everyone was on board.

“We don’t support this ordinance,” John Mathews, lawyer for the Pleasant Valley County Water District, told the board. The district covers land south of Camarillo on the eastern Oxnard Plain.

The reporting system is new for Pleasant Valley, Mathews said, adding that there were many ways the ordinance could go haywire.

Others had complaints with specifics. But Fox Canyon board Chairman Lynn Maulhardt said users could argue for exceptions.

For cities and industrial pumpers, pain is coming soon. A 10 percent cutback starts July 1, with 5 percent reductions next January and in July 2015.

For ag users, a slower rollout was devised, with an effective 10 percent pumping reduction hitting in February and another in August 2015 to accommodate growing schedules.

The situation was likened to two trains leaving stations at different times but arriving together — summer 2015 — at the 20 percent reduction.

Compared with the two prior meetings on the topic, Friday’s mood was eased by a sense of acceptance.

Lucie McGovern, of Camarillo’s public works department, for example, said the city already was preparing for the ordinance’s passage. For Camarillo, it represents 1,300 acre-feet a year valued at \$2 million, a sum not in the water budget that likely will come from reserves. An acre-foot is about 326,000 gallons.

But Friday’s revised version addressed about 80 percent of her concerns, McGovern told the board.

Oxnard officials, who previously submitted letters of opposition, made no comments Friday.

Fox Canyon board member Charlotte Craven, a Camarillo City Council member, made the motion to approve Emergency Ordinance E.

“The longer we delay, the worse the situation is going to be,” she said.

Members of the previously divided board, who represent farming, water district and municipal interests, weighed in one by one, indicating their support for moving ahead.

Members Michael Kelley and David Borchard, who opposed earlier versions, had been deeply involved in drawing up the new approach. Both praised the agency's staff for being receptive to the ag group's proposals.

"We have done it the way we intended it," Maulhardt said before the final vote. "The truth is, we have actually done this as a group."

As the room thinned out, farmers in jeans and button-up shirts chatted in clusters outside chambers before heading out in the late-afternoon light to a parking lot filled with pickups.

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