

NEWS CLIPS

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Resource Conservation and Public Outreach

Organized by date

Water officials fear more drought

Some say bond will bring limited relief

Ventura County Star 2/20/2015

SACRAMENTO — As California's drought progresses through another winter with only slight relief, the effects on individual homeowners appear certain to mount.

After getting through last year without imposing mandatory conservation measures by drawing down 1 million acre-feet of reserves, directors of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California began talking this month about whether and how to begin rationing supplies to customers from Ventura County to San Diego.

"This drought is unlike anything we've seen in the past. Last year was the hottest year we've ever had — 4 to 5 degrees higher than we've ever seen," district Assistant General Manager Roger Patterson said. "We're preparing for the worst."

State and regional water managers will participate in a drought response workshop next week to brief water officials in Southern California on emergency regulations and other water restrictions.

Up in the Sierra, the winter snowpack, which constitutes the state water system's most important storage supply, stands at less than 25 percent of normal. And record setting mid-February temperatures have triggered the beginnings of an early melt.

Against this sobering backdrop, Patterson and dozens of other water experts convened Thursday in Sacramento for an annual conference where they sought to focus on the positive, including last fall's passage of a \$7.5 billion water bond that they agreed will help address some long range challenges.

"The bond will make a difference in water supply reliability," said Cindy Tuck, deputy executive director of the Association of California Water Agencies.

Still, many acknowledged that the bond, which had been trimmed from a previous version that lawmakers feared was too expensive for voters to embrace, will have limited immediate effect and do little to offset the upward march in water rates.

If the drought continues into a fourth year, which now appears likely, and potentially into a fifth, it may cause some to question the wisdom of having scaled back the bond, said Joe Caves, a lobbyist who specializes in environmental and natural resources issues.

"We're going to look back and say it wasn't nearly big enough," Caves said.

While some late-winter storms still could relieve pressure on water districts and cities to implement mandatory rationing, California residents can expect one certain development ahead: water rates are certain to continue to climb.

"The bond is going to help, but it's only going to help a little bit," said Denise Kruger, an executive with Golden State Water Co., a privately owned utility that supplies water to

257,000 customers across the state. “The bottom line is going to come out of the customers’ pocket.”

The rates charged by the Metropolitan Water District, the wholesaler that supplies the imported water upon which most Ventura County businesses and homeowners rely, have about doubled over the past decade and are still headed upward.

“The price of water is going to go up,” Patterson said. “Our rates — it’s inevitable — are going to be increasing 4 percent to 5 percent a year.”

Kruger said water remains relatively cheap compared with other household expenses, but rate increases are already straining the ability of many households to pay this essential expense.

“The cost of water is starting at a very low point,” she said. “That said, it’s really becoming unaffordable.

We do have a real problem in California with affordability that we can’t turn a blind eye to.”

The cost of water is starting at a very low point. That said, it’s really becoming unaffordable. ”

Denise Kruger, *Golden State Water Co. executive*

Troublesome pipeline OK'd

By Sylvie Belmont
The Acorn 2/19/2015

Las Virgenes Municipal Water District officials approved funding for a \$1.5-million recycled water pipeline to be installed under a two-mile stretch of Agoura Road between Ladyface Court and Cornell Road.

The work will be done in conjunction with the city's Agoura Road widening project, which is set to begin soon.

The City of Agoura Hills is expanding Agoura Road from two to four lanes from the city's western border to Cornell Road. The work will pave the way for commercial and residential development along the road that has been planned for more than a decade.

In December, the Agoura City Council and the Joint Powers Authority, consisting of Las Virgenes Municipal Water District and Triunfo Sanitation District, butted heads over the pipeline project.

The JPA told the city it was not going to fund the new 8-inch recycled water line as part of the road widening project because costs were too high.

At the urging of the city, LVMWD and Triunfo officials reconsidered the issue at a special meeting Feb. 2. The water officials said they also realized it would be cheaper and less disruptive to build the new pipeline when the street is already torn up for the road widening.

The city offered to contribute \$300,000 toward the work.

Since Triunfo and LVMWD both have a stake in the Joint Powers Authority, which coowns the Tapia Wastewater Reclamation Facility and manages recycled water infrastructure for the area, the project required a majority vote from both the boards to proceed.

But while LVMWD officials voted unanimously in favor of the project, Triunfo directors were split on the issue. Directors Janna Orkney and Mike Paule were opposed, and Director Steven Iceland was absent, resulting in a 2-2 vote.

Triunfo serves about 30,000 residents in Oak Park, North Ranch, Lake Sherwood, Westlake and portions of Bell Canyon. As part of the joint agreement, Triunfo pays about 30 percent of the construction costs for recycling infrastructure, yet few of those projects benefit ratepayers in Triunfo, Orkney said.

But Director James Wall said that by voting for the Agoura pipeline he hopes LVMWD will support projects benefiting Triunfo in the future.

After the JPA meeting, LVMWD officials reconvened separately and again voted unanimously to approve funding for the pipeline.

The new pipeline will allow the district to move more recycled water from the east side to the west side of the city and reduce the use of potable water in the area, officials said.

New funding available for lawn conversion

By Sylvie Belmont
The Acorn

With California facing a fourth year of drought, water officials are considering tightening restrictions on outdoor watering even as they hold out hope that the storms of December and January will help quench the state's thirst.

The state's water supplies are running low, the price of water will continue to rise and many communities are considering rationing. As a result, some residents are choosing to convert their thirsty front lawns into drought-tolerant gardens.

To help residents conserve water and save money, Las Virgenes Municipal Water District officials approved an additional \$1.1 million in funding for the district's front yard turf removal program.

Called "Mow No Mow," the turf removal rebate program is available to residential and commercial property owners in the Las Virgenes water district's service area who are eligible to participate.

There is no monetary limit on the size of the rebate for residential properties. Commercial properties must be at least 50,000 square feet and inspected first by the Metropolitan Water District. Upon approval, the work must be completed within 120 days.

The rebate program is intended to save money for customers, reduce water runoff and help water agencies meet the state mandate to meet a 20 percent reduction in use by the year 2020.

"If you're considering taking advantage of the Mow No Mow program, submit your application sooner rather than later as there's no guarantee of additional funding beyond what has already been authorized," said Jeff Reinhardt, LVMWD spokesperson.

The \$1.1 million funding increase was added to an existing \$1 million that was allocated to the turf removal program last July, making a total of \$2.1 million available to ratepayers in the Las Virgenes district.

"The program is generating a lot of response. All the original money has been committed to projects," Reinhardt said.

The rebate program is jointly funded by LVMWD, the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, the California Department of Water Resources and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

Metropolitan will reimburse all LVMWD expenses, except for administrative costs.

A survey conducted in the LVMWD service area shows that nearly 70 percent of potable water delivered to customers is used outdoors and many customers over water, causing runoff into storm drains.

Details on how to qualify for the rebate program are available at www.LVMWD.com under "Conservation." Information is also available at the district headquarters, 4232 Las Virgenes Road in Calabasas.

LVMWD also offers a free catalog of native and other drought-tolerant plants that can replace turf and require little watering. The plant guide is available online or in print at district headquarters.

2015-02-19 / Community

Spouting off in Agoura

The Acorn



WET 'N WILD—David Roff took this photo on Feb. 15 of a broken fire hydrant on the northeastern corner of Reyes Adobe Road and Thousand Oaks Boulevard in Agoura Hills. A car apparently struck the hydrant, which released the approximate 60-foot spout. Work crews arrived within minutes to turn the water off, Roff said.

Learn to Conserve from Children!

Every Drop Counts



2014 Water Awareness Poster Contest Finalist
Sydnie Feder, 5th Grade, Ms. Tulbure, Chaparral Elementary



www.LVMWD.com

08A54T

Water main breaks, flooding Hollywood

At least four cars are submerged

Ventura County Star 2/19/2015



Residents watch as water from a main break floods the backyard of their apartment Wednesday in the Hollywood section of Los Angeles. A torrent of water flowed down

LOSANGELES— An estimated 100,000 gallons of water flowed along residential streets and submerged cars in a parking lot after a nearly century-old 18-inch main burst early Wednesday a few blocks north of Hollywood Boulevard.

“It sounded like a rain shower, and we looked outside and it wasn’t. It was just a lot of water,” resident Brenda Burror, whose family’s cars were submerged, told KCBS-TV. “Right now we’re trying to cancel work and school, see what we can do to fix the cars.”

In the parking lot, which sits below street level, at least four cars were surrounded by about three feet of standing water.

The extent of the damage wasn’t immediately determined.

Miller Lee, whose father owns the apartments, told the Los Angeles Times that his family stored classic cars, including a 1954 Triumph convertible, antique Italian furniture and pricey Persian rugs in ground-floor garages.

“I’m devastated,” Lee said. “I feel bad for our tenants.”

Crews eventually shut off the water and drained the lot.

The 18-inch cast-iron pipe that broke was installed in 1926 and serves 20 water meters in the area with single-family homes and apartment buildings, said Kim Hughes with the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power.

The cause of the break was under investigation.

Aging infrastructure has resulted in a series of water main breaks in and around Los Angeles in recent years.

Residential streets and submerged cars in the parking lot after an 18-inch main burst in Hollywood. Water department officials said the cause of the break is under investigation.

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Colorado snowpack near normal

Ventura County Star 2/19/2015

DENVER — Snowpack in the mountain valleys where the Colorado River originates was only a little below normal on Wednesday, marking one of the few bright spots in an increasingly grim drought gripping much of the West.

Measurement stations in western Colorado showed the snowpack at 90 percent of the long-term average.

By contrast, reporting stations in the Sierra Nevada range in drought stricken California showed snowpack at 50 percent or less in early February, the most recent figures available. Some detected no snow at all.

Mountain snow in Colorado is closely monitored because a half-dozen Western waterways, including the 1,400-mile Colorado River, start in the area. The river and its tributaries supply water to millions of people in seven states and Mexico.

Much of the river comes from mountain snow that accumulates during winter and melts in the spring.

“It’s looking pretty dismal over much of the West, but there are some areas where we’re OK,” said Mike Strobel, manager of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Snow Survey.

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2/19/2015

VENTURA

Tests show water issue

Chemical level rose for a time; no danger seen

Ventura County Star 2/19/2015

A byproduct of the disinfectants used in drinking water exceeded allowable levels last month, affecting Ventura residents in Pierpont, the Keys and some downtown neighborhoods, city water officials said.

Testing for a variety of contaminants is required quarterly. Tests conducted Jan. 20 showed levels of trihalomethanes were 84.3 parts per billion at Harbor Boulevard and Spinnaker Drive and reached 96.8 parts per billion at Fir Street and Thompson Boulevard, according to water officials. The state deems up to 80 parts per billion safe.

The amount has since fallen below those levels, city Water Utility Manager Omar Castro said.

"The water's completely safe to drink," he said, adding that the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention say a person would have to be exposed to high levels of trihalomethanes for 70 years to possibly experience health issues.

Other studies have shown inconclusive results from short-term exposure.

Trihalomethanes are four chemicals formed when "chlorine or other disinfectants used to control microbial contaminants in drinking water react with naturally occurring organic and inorganic matter in water," the Environmental Protection Agency says on its website.

The state requires chlorine or another disinfectant be used to fight any bacteria that get into the water through a leak or other problem.

Subsequent tests Feb. 11 and 12 showed levels were 39, 45, 46 and 53 parts of trihalomethanes per billion. A Feb. 12 test at an additional site did not show any levels, Castro said.

It's difficult to say how long the chemicals exceeded allowable levels. The most recent previous tests were done in October. Results from those came back fine.

The drought has caused issues with water quality up and down the state, in part because low water levels mean a higher concentration of organics in the water, Castro said.

Officials changed the blending ratio of water coming from the Ventura River, Lake Casitas and wells to get the numbers into compliance, he said.

"There's a lot of thought process and calculations to try and get that perfect," Castro said.

At the Pierpont Community Council meeting Tuesday, some residents questioned why it took so long to be notified of the problem.

Castro said it takes seven to 10 days for the state to notify an entity of a problem. Then the state must approve Ventura's process for notifying customers. The whole thing takes a while, he said.

If the problem had been determined to be an "acute" health risk, residents would have been notified within 24 hours, he said.

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2/19/2015

Letters

Water and houses

Yvonne Di Francesco, Moorpark

Re: Hillside homes proposed in Ventura: Really? More homes being built? Here we are in the fourth year of a drought that some say will last 35 years and get worse and worse, and new homes are being built. How about a moratorium on new housing in the whole state of California?

This is ridiculous. My yard has to go brown, trees die, plants die, and more houses are being built.

Ventura County Star 2/19/2015

Lingering drought may trigger water rationing in Southern California

Timm Herdt
Ventura County Star Feb 19, 2015



FILE PHOTO Richard Vogel

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After getting through last year without imposing mandatory conservation measures by drawing down 1 million acre-feet of reserves, directors of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California earlier this month began talking about whether and how to begin rationing supplies to customers from Ventura County to San Diego.

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“The cost of water is starting at a very low point,” she said. “That said, it’s really becoming unaffordable. We do have a real problem in California with affordability that we can’t turn a blind eye to.”

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Ventura drinking water missed health standards in January, officials say

Arlene Martinez
Ventura County Star Feb 18, 2015



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO Map shows area of Ventura where high levels of trihalomethanes were detected in the water.

VENTURA, Calif. - A byproduct of disinfectants used in drinking water exceeded allowable levels last month, affecting Ventura residents in the Pierpont, Keys and some downtown neighborhoods, city water officials said.

Mandatory testing for a variety of contaminants is required quarterly. Tests conducted Jan. 20 showed levels of trihalomethanes were 84.3 parts per billion at Harbor Boulevard and Spinnaker Drive, and reached 96.8 parts per billion at Fir Street and Thompson Boulevard, according to water officials. The state deems levels up to 80 parts per billion safe.

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State officials eye new water restrictions

Regulations could expand with drought

Ventura County Star 2/18/2015

SACRAMENTO — As the California drought drags on, water officials are considering expanding mandatory outdoor water restrictions on homeowners and adding new limits on restaurants, hotels and decorative fountains.

At an informational meeting Tuesday, the State Water Resources Control Board also appeared ready to extend existing rules imposed last summer to boost water supplies.

That would mean Californians still won't be able to wash cars with hoses that don't shut off and must limit watering their lawns.

The emergency regulations also authorized agencies to fine water wasters up to \$500 a day, though such stringent enforcement has been rare.

Possible new rules under consideration include a ban on running outdoor water fountains and prohibiting lawn watering during cold and rainy periods.

"The key is to get away from very light mandatory restrictions," said Felicia Marcus, chairwoman of the board.

Other ideas presented Tuesday targeted businesses such as requiring restaurants to only serve water on request and telling hotels not to automatically provide guests with fresh towels and sheets every day. Some cities have similar rules already in place.

The board has considered making some water restrictions permanent with the prospect of future droughts looming.

"We definitely need permanent regulations," said Frances Spivy-Weber, the board vice-chairwoman. "I just don't see how we can enter the next 30 years with climate change without them."

The board has the power to define unreasonable water use. That power can also be used to ban golf course and cemetery owners from using drinking water to maintain landscapes when recycled water is available, but Marcus said the board isn't targeting those areas now.

The board could consider the extension of restrictions next month and take up other possible regulations later in the year.

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2/18/2015

Environmental group opposes wells near Piru

From staff reports
Ventura County Star 2/18/2015

An environmental group is appealing the Ventura County Planning Division's decisions allowing seven oil wells to be established in the Piru area.

Los Padres Forest Watch of Santa Barbara will ask the Ventura County Planning Commission on Thursday to overturn the decisions, citing the need to protect endangered California condors.

County Planning Director Kim Prillhart has found the construction is consistent with permits issued in 1956 and 2010.

DCOR of Ventura is seeking two wells in the Hopper Canyon Oil Field, 2 miles northwest of Piru, and five in the Temescal Oil Field, 3 miles northeast of Piru and less than a half mile west of Lake Piru.

If the group loses the appeal, it may take the issue to the Ventura County Board of Supervisors.

The hearing is scheduled for 8:30 a.m. Thursday in the hearing room of the Ventura County Board of Supervisors at the Hall of Administration in the Ventura County Government Center, 800 S. Victoria Ave., Ventura.

On the Net: <http://bit.ly/1AOhnrh>

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2/18/2015

L.A.'s aging water pipes; a \$1-billion dilemma

By Ben Poston and Matt Stevens

Feb. 16, 2015

LA TIMES

The water main break that flooded Nowita Place in 2013 wasn't the kind of spectacle that brought TV cameras. Water sprayed a foot in the air through a hole in the buckled asphalt, leaving residents in the Venice neighborhood without water service for hours.

But the break fit an increasingly common pattern for L.A.'s aging waterworks: The pipe was more than 80 years old. It was rusted out. And it was buried in corrosive soil.

About one-fifth of the city's water pipes were installed before 1931 and nearly all will reach the end of their useful lives in the next 15 years. They are responsible for close to half of all water main leaks, and replacing them is a looming, \$1-billion problem for the city.

"We must do something about our infrastructure and we must make the necessary investment," said H. David Nahai, former head of the Department of Water and Power. "If we don't act now, we'll simply pay more later."

By the numbers

6,730 — Miles of pipe in the DWP water main network

435 — Miles of deteriorated water mains that DWP wants to replace, about 6.5% of the network

\$1.34 billion — Cost to replace at-risk water mains by 2025

\$44 million — Annual average amount DWP has spent on pipe replacement in the last eight fiscal years

\$135 million — Annual spending needed to reach 10-year pipe replacement goal

Source: Los Angeles Department of Water and Power

The DWP has a \$1.3-billion plan to replace 435 miles of deteriorating pipe in the next 10 years, but difficult questions remain about how the agency will find the money, how much it will inconvenience commuters and whether the utility can ever catch up with its aging infrastructure.

To reach its goal by 2025, the DWP would need to more than double the number of pipe miles it replaces annually and more than triple the average amount it spends on pipe replacement each year. Water officials said the department has already budgeted \$78

million for water main replacement in the current fiscal year, a significant increase from its annual average.

Future funding for the plan will depend on a combination of higher water rates, bond sales and other department revenue. Getting city leaders to approve higher water rates that the agency says it needs could require political maneuvering as the DWP deals with a standoff between city leaders and two nonprofit trusts over \$40 million the agency gave to the organizations. The department is also rebounding from a billing scandal in late 2013.

"Like the average rate-payer, I will have to be shown the case" for an increase, Mayor Eric Garcetti said, "but I'm interested in not burying my head on this problem."

Leaks in L.A. water grid

A water trunk rupture spews about 20 million gallons of water on Sunset Boulevard, flooding parts of the UCLA campus and Pauley Pavillion. (Jay L. Clendenin / Los Angeles Times)



A water pipe break in West Hollywood sent torrents of muddy water down Sunset Strip on Friday afternoon, prompting a series of street closures. (Jay L. Clendenin / Los Angeles Times)



Firefighters and workers clear mud and water at Pauley Pavilion after a major water trunk break. (Jabin Botsford / Los Angeles Times)



Pedestrian cross a flooded street where a water pipe ruptured. (Ricardo DeAratanha / Los Angeles Times)



A firefighter follows a water pipe break on Sunset Boulevard. (Emily Rhyne / Los Angeles Times)



DWP workers break through Alvarado Street to access a broken water pipe. (Al Seib / Los Angeles Times)



DWP workers break through Alvarado Street to access a broken water pipe. (Al Seib / Los Angeles Times)

As officials weigh rate increases, pipes continue to deteriorate and leak, spewing millions of gallons of water onto city streets amid one of California's worst droughts on record. And costs to repair and maintain the aging system mount, totaling more than \$250 million over the last eight fiscal years.

More than a quarter-million pipes make up the DWP's 6,730-mile water main network. Since 2006, work crews have responded to about 13,000 leaks, about four a day across the city.

Some areas experienced more leaks than others — Hollywood Hills West, Mid-City and Hollywood accounted for the largest number of leaks in the city since 2010, agency data show.

Leaks by area, 2010 to 2014

Sources: Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, MapBox and OpenStreetMap.

During the last eight fiscal years, the department spent an average of \$44 million annually to replace about 21 miles of pipe per year.

Still, water officials estimate that about 8 billion gallons of water are lost each year to leaky pipes, firefighting, evaporation, theft and other unaccounted losses, though they emphasize that the leak rate has been in decline over the last decade, and is about half the industry average. But the lost water could supply almost 50,000 households for a year.

One small pipe in Woodland Hills leaked more than half a million gallons of water over the course of the year it took the DWP to find and fix it. A DWP spokeswoman said ambient noise made it difficult to find the leak with sound equipment. Workers drilled dozens of holes and dug out sections of the road to locate the leak, leaving uneven patches and a pothole filled with water, residents said.

"This thing was wasting water and we're in this severe drought," said Rick Russell, who visits his mother in the neighborhood. "It's kind of like a slap in the face."

Analyzing pipe infrastructure data, The Times found that pipe age, soil quality, water pressure and leak history are key factors that contribute to leaky water mains. DWP engineers weigh those factors when prioritizing pipes for replacement, assigning a letter grade to each water main based on its likelihood of failure and the potential consequences of a break. About 6% of the system earned grades of D and F, according to The Times' analysis.

The department's 10-year plan is aimed at replacing pipes that have poor grades. Officials believe that they can replace all the pipes now ranked D and F by 2025.

More than 40% of the pipes graded D and F were installed in 1930 or earlier as Los Angeles' population boomed. The expansion of underground water mains in the city mirrored the growth in population above ground. Installation dropped off during the Great Depression and World War II, and surged during the baby boom, when the DWP installed more than 2,500 miles of water mains, department data show. Those postwar pipes will approach the end of their useful life span in about 30 years.

Lucio Soibelman, a civil engineering professor at USC, reviewed the DWP's database of more than 260,000 water mains that The Times obtained through a California Public Records Act request. He found that older pipes in corrosive soils such as the sandy ground in Venice are the most likely to leak.

"These are the pipes that have to be replaced first," Soibelman said.

Those aren't the only factors, though. Water pressure and leak history are also important indicators of potential pipe failure, said Julie Spacht, the DWP's water executive managing engineer. Nearly 30% of the leaky pipes had more than one leak, the data show. Most of the at-risk water mains are being targeted for repair, The Times' review shows.

"Because pipes are out of sight and out of mind, no one has really thought about how we're going to pay for this." — Colin Chung, an asset management consultant Share this quote

Outdated engineering methods can also make a pipe more likely to fail. Cast iron mains installed before the 1930s often rusted from the inside out, causing leaks, officials said. DWP workers began lining new pipes in the mid-1930s with concrete. That change corresponds to a steep decline in leaks, The Times found.

Cities such as Portland, Ore., San Francisco and Seattle are also seeing old pipes come of age, according to infrastructure experts who praised the DWP for addressing the issue.

"This is not just an L.A. problem," said Colin Chung, an asset management consultant based in Irvine. "Because pipes are out of sight and out of mind, no one has really thought about how we're going to pay for this."

One of the biggest recent pipe failures occurred last summer on Sunset Boulevard when two trunk lines — arterial pipes with diameters larger than 20 inches — ruptured. One of the trunk lines was more than 90 years old and graded C when it failed. The other was more than 80 and graded D.

Los Angeles DWP crews replace a water main



The broken pipes sent about 20 million gallons of water rushing into Westwood, rendering cars inoperable, warping the hardwood floor in UCLA's Pauley Pavilion and causing what school administrators estimated would be millions of dollars in damage.

Pipe repair costs totaled almost \$900,000, DWP said.

After the blowout, Garcetti asked the DWP to present a plan to address the city's infrastructure. Garcetti said the agency's goal of replacing D- and F-rated pipes by 2025 is achievable using mostly bonds and cash from existing base rates.

He didn't rule out water rate increases, but that requires public meetings and political capital from the DWP Board of Commissioners, City Council and mayor, all of whom must approve an increase.

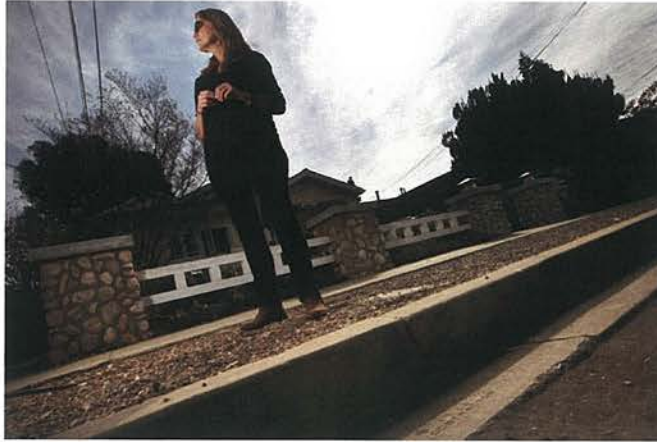
"We do need to pay for what we need to fix," Garcetti said.

Although the DWP's \$1.3-billion plan would fix many of the current problem pipes, water officials said it doesn't address pipes that will deteriorate in coming years. Even the department conceded it is unlikely that it will ever entirely catch up.

Agency officials must also contend with quality-of-life realities for Los Angeles residents. Replacing several hundred miles of pipe could snarl traffic on roads that must be excavated. And the work will cause headaches for those who have to endure construction outside their homes.

The department's plan could also be hampered by constant regulation changes, water price fluctuations and evolving drought conditions, which some infrastructure experts said can make executing a massive long-term initiative nearly impossible.

But water officials said they need to act now.



Leslie Pope says DWP crews have repaired four leaks on her street in Venice since 2010. (Bob Chamberlin / Los Angeles Times)

"The goals we set are 'stretch'-type goals, but not unreasonable," Spacht said. "We're in a spot where we have an opportunity to take measures to keep us from being in a desperate situation in the future."

Leslie Pope and her husband, Doug Fischer, who live on Nowita Place in Venice, said they would pay higher water rates if it meant improved pipes. Since 2010, crews have repaired four leaks on their street and three on the next block.

The day the pipe split in front of her Craftsman bungalow, Pope and about 60 of her neighbors went without water most of the day, according to DWP records. Cones and a massive white truck blocked off the area as crews pumped out standing water. Workers ripped out and tossed aside chunks of asphalt, then dug a chest-deep hole that measured 12 feet square, the records show.

By the late afternoon, crews had removed and replaced seven feet of rusty pipe, records show.

"I love Venice," Fischer said. "But it's old and falling apart, and these things need to be taken care of."

Contact The Reporters

Follow @bposton and @ByMattStevens on Twitter for updates on the city's infrastructure.

Times staff writer Peter Jamison and researcher Kent Coloma contributed to this report.

Credits: Interactive Map: Priya Krishnakumar. Interactive Chart and Digital Producer: Honest Charley Bodkin.

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Water, air quality fears conflict with pig farms

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LA Times



Modern meat production, in which thousands of animals are packed into barns for concentrated feeding operations, has proven to be efficient and profitable, but comes with its own set of problems.

From [Washington state](#) to [North Carolina](#), federal lawsuits are challenging the livestock industry to change its ways, basing arguments on studies that increasingly show the impact that phosphorous, nitrates and bacteria from fertilizer and accumulated manure have on lakes and rivers, as well as air pollution that can be harmful to respiratory health.

Livestock farmers insist they're trying to ameliorate the problem by installing grass strips, tilling less and using other techniques to keep manure and fertilizer from draining into waterways.

"I have a general care and concern for the state's water quality and I've personally invested my own dollars to install conservation nutrient retention practices on my farm," said Bill Couser, a fifth-generation Iowa farmer with 5,200 cows. "We realize this is not going to happen overnight or in two years. This could take up to 10 years as this technology comes along."

However, those who rely on rivers and lakes for drinking water or live near the large-scale operations — especially in the top two hog-producing states of Iowa and North Carolina — are growing impatient. Joined by environmental and animal rights groups in

a growing number of lawsuits, they're highlighting the debate between the right to raise livestock and the right to clean water and air.

Des Moines' water utility, which serves a half-million people, recently filed a notice of intent to sue farmers in three counties populated by 1.2 million pigs and a million turkeys because it must run water sourced from two central Iowa rivers through a costly system to strip out nitrate, which at levels above a federal limit can reduce the amount of oxygen carried in the blood of children younger than 6.

A federal judge in eastern Washington ruled last month that an industrial dairy farm's manure management practices posed an "imminent and substantial endangerment" to the environment and thousands in the lower Yakima Valley who rely on well water. And on Jan. 28, a coalition of groups sued the EPA for what they said is a failure to address air pollution from cattle, hog and poultry farms in [California](#), [Wisconsin](#) and [Iowa](#).

"Pork is cheap and cheap to produce in large factories because they don't pay for cleaning up the Des Moines water supply and they don't pay for the asthma neighbors get, they don't pay for polluting downstream water that used to be potable and they don't pay for the loss of property values," said Steve Wing, a University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill epidemiologist.

About 68 percent of the nation's lakes, reservoirs and ponds and more than half of its rivers and streams are impaired, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency says, meaning they don't meet one or more water-quality standards and are considered too polluted for the intended use. The main culprit: agriculture, including poorly located or poorly managed animal-feeding operations and misapplication of chemicals and fertilizer, EPA reports show.

The hog industry's shift from small family farms to large-scale farms is dramatic, going from more than 200,000 in the early 1990s to just over 21,600 in 2012.

A driving force behind some of the large-scale hog farms is Murphy-Brown LLC, which became part of the world's largest pork producer when China-based WH Group bought corporate parent Smithfield Foods in 2013. WH Group aims to feed China's appetite for meat with cheaper hogs from the United States, and that foreshadows increased production in the U.S., according to lawsuits filed in eastern North Carolina.

The water- and air-quality lawsuits are mostly driven by advocates of locally grown food as well as animal-rights and environmental activists. But in some cases, farmers are going after farmers.

Barb Kalbach has fought for more than a decade against the construction of huge hog operations, and joined a statewide nonprofit that argues such enterprises are ruining Iowa's waterways.

Pork is a \$7 billion industry in Iowa, which is the nation's largest pork producer with about 21 million pigs — seven times the number of human residents — that create about 9 billion gallons of manure annually.

"I have in the back of my mind this idea that we have thousands of miles of clean water, which is a gift in this state and we just throw manure in it," the 64-year-old said. She and her husband, who live about 40 miles west of Des Moines, once raised a few hogs, cattle and sheep, but quit primarily because it's difficult to compete with large-scale operations that have corporate meatpacking contracts.

About 200 miles north, Matt Schuiteman raises about 3,000 hogs plus some cattle. Since 2008, the 40-year-old farmer has worked with the city of Sioux Center, Dordt College and others to research how to keep nitrogen on the farmland and out of waterways.

Farmers care about the environment and are willing to work on improvements that will minimize impact, he said, adding that lawsuits aren't the course of action.

"Maybe we can all get to where we want to be together instead of drawing the battle lines ... You want to force some action but there are ways to do it and ways that don't work," he said.

In North Carolina, 10 million hogs produce as much fecal waste in a day as 100 million people, much of it stored in ponds as large as three football fields. The treated, liquefied manure and urine is then pumped to large sprinkler systems and flung on fields for fertilizer.

For people like Richard Brown, whose trailer is surrounded on three sides by fields that soak up effluent from 2,500 nearby hogs, the smell is a daily drag.

"It just stinks like the devil," said Brown, who lives in Duplin County — the nation's top county for hog production, according to the U.S. Agriculture Department's 2012 census.

Brown is one of about 500 who've joined the federal lawsuits against Murphy-Brown, alleging the farms deprive them of enjoying their property because of the strong odor — complaints first raised two decades ago that plaintiffs say have gone unanswered by legislators and regulators.

Gases and air particles from the manure affect residents' mental and physical health, Wing says, including breathing difficulty, sore throat, nausea, eye irritations and high blood pressure.

The putrid liquid rains down on 66-year-old Elsie Herring's property in nearby Wallace, and the odor makes her cough and her eyes burn. "Whenever they start spraying, we're held prisoners inside. ... If you're outside it will blow down on you," she said.

Murphy-Brown encourages residents to express concerns about operations, but only a handful do in any given year, the company said in a statement. "We take these complaints seriously and seek swift resolution as part of our environmental management system," the company said. "We have a vested interest in the health and well-being of these communities and we work to maintain positive relationships with our neighbors."

The choice, according to Iowa State University economist Catherine King, may come down to consumers: Does the public pay to remove contaminants or shell out more for meat?

"We don't know how to produce food and fuel from this incredibly rich land without having nitrogen and nutrient pollution, so society has to figure out what balance it wants," King said. "Society needs to be engaged in a conversation about what trade-offs we are willing to make and who is going to bear the cost."

Earth week: A Diary of the Planet

By Steve Newman

An El Niño Dud?

Has there been an El Niño over the past few months or not? Some Californians would like to think their brief but potent bouts of drought-busting storms were brought by what has been a marginal ocean warming of the tropical Pacific. But San Francisco still just had its driest January on record. And while some global weather patterns have been similar to what would be expected during an El Niño, the main characteristics of the phenomenon have not really set in. This has baffled scientists since computer models had consistently predicted a major El Niño would develop in 2014. Australia's Bureau of Meteorology says that temperatures across the Pacific have recently returned to a "neutral" level, somewhere between what would be considered an El Niño and a La Niña. But the Japan Meteorological Agency says the atmospheric jury is still out. It predicts a 50 percent chance El Niño will re-emerge during the Northern Hemisphere summer.

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Drought, warmth freeze ski resorts

Destinations in California lacking snow

Ventura County Star 2/14/2015



Melting snow reveals rocks and dirt last month at an idle ski lift at the Donner Ski Ranch in Norden. Midway through California's ski season, the ranch is one of several ski resorts that have suspended operations due to the state's historic drought ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTOS

FRESNO— With California entering its fourth drought year, even some big resorts with millions of dollars in modern snow-making equipment don't have all their lifts running.

The midsized and family- owned resorts struggling most had hoped to reopen for the Presidents Day holiday, traditionally the year's biggest weekend for skiing.

A recent winter storm that washed over the state originated in the tropics and dropped more rain than the much-needed snow. While any wet weather is welcome in California, the storm didn't end the drought or put all the dormant resorts back in business.

"We're basically the canary in the coal mine," said Janet Tuttle, who owns Donner Ski Ranch northwest of Lake Tahoe and one of about seven resorts forced to close midseason. "It's kind of a sad state here in California."

A stingy snowfall had left Donner's mountain face marked with brown patches of exposed dirt and rock. Tuttle and her husband, Marshall, closed the resort's six chairlifts and two beginner runs by mid-January. They reopened Wednesday with a little boost from the recent storm, hoping to keep the lifts running this weekend.

She worried about more warm weather in the forecast. "I'm not very happy about that," she said.

California's 27 resorts — and two in neighboring Nevada — make up the nation's second-most popular destination for skiers and snowboarders after Colorado, said Bob Roberts, executive director of the California Ski Industry Association.

China Peak Mountain Resort east of Fresno was among the latest ski areas forced to suspend business, following others in Northern California such as Donner Ski Ranch, Dodge Ridge and Yosemite's Badger Pass. Mt. Baldy Ski Lifts near Los Angeles also closed.

Homewood Mountain Resort at Lake Tahoe suspended skiing early this month but also plans to open for the Presidents Day weekend with a few inches of fresh snow from recent storms.

Ski season started strong with heavy snowfall in December blanketing California's mountains. Resorts opened before Christmas, earlier than the previous year, with raised hopes that more snow would follow.

But January set records as the driest and the second warmest in recorded history, said Michael Anderson, a climatologist with the state's Department of Water Resources.



Rental ski boots sitting in rows at the closed rental shop at the Donner Ski Ranch showcase how a lack of snow is hurting business at California's ski resorts this skiing season.

The Sierra Nevada this January received 2 percent of its normal precipitation, with an average high temperature of 53 degrees, he said. In an unsettling trend, four of California's 10 driest Januaries have occurred since 2007, said Anderson, adding that several days recently at Lake Tahoe have reached the mid-60s. He spent last weekend with his family in the Sierra's Donner Summit, where it rained.

"When it's raining at the top of the mountain, it's awful hard to build a snowpack," he said.

Other Western states have gotten their share of snow this year, said Michael Berry, president of the National Ski Areas Association, noting favorable skiing in Colorado, Utah, Wyoming and Montana. He said storms have hit Washington, but the warm temperatures pushed the snow level to higher elevations.

Meanwhile, much of California remains locked in extreme drought.

Tim Cohee, owner of China Peak Mountain Resort, thought he could keep the lifts running through Presidents Day weekend. But Cohee said that only the beginner skiing hill and a slope for sleds and inner tubes would be open for the holiday. China Peak has snow-making machines, but the warm weather gave Cohee few opportunities to turn

them on. The recent rain made the mountain blotchy, so he suspended skiing. Cohee said China Peak and other small resorts are facing serious financial hardship.

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