

# NEWS CLIPS

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**Resource Conservation and Public Outreach**

Organized by date

## Cooler today; chance of thunderstorms

Source: Ventura County Star 9/11/15



The National Weather Service reported a cooling trend will begin Friday and that remnants of former Hurricane Linda will bring a slight chance of thunderstorms to the mountains of Ventura and Los Angeles counties through Sunday.

Temperatures in coastal and valley areas should drop 2 to 4 degrees daily beginning Friday and reach normal levels by Monday. Humidity and night-time temperatures also should decrease, forecasters said.

A low-pressure system was expected to arrive Monday, bringing temperatures to below normal next week,

It will be mostly sunny Friday morning, then become partly cloudy. The highs will be from the lower to mid 80s at the beaches to around 90 inland. The highs for Saturday will be from the mid to upper 70s at the beaches to the lower to mid 80s inland and mid 80s to mid 90s farther inland.

# Drought is no reason to ease environmental protections, California voters say

Source: LA Times 9/11/15



Many Californians have sacrificed their lawns in the effort to reduce water use, but more than half of state voters surveyed say the drought has had a minor or no impact on their lives. (Brian van der Brug / Los Angeles Times)

After four parched years, most California voters seem to be taking the drought in stride, saying it has had little to no effect on their daily lives. They oppose sacrificing environmental protections to expand water supplies and generally approve of how Gov. Jerry Brown has handled the crisis, according to a new statewide USC Dornsife/Los Angeles Times poll.

While a majority of respondents opposed easing environmental restrictions, voters strongly favored other approaches to boosting supplies, such as water recycling, capturing storm runoff and increasing groundwater storage.

The poll results suggest that California has proved remarkably resilient during one of the worst droughts on record — one that prompted Brown to impose the state's first-ever mandatory restrictions on urban water use.

The mandate this spring didn't hurt Brown. Approval ratings of his handling of the drought rose to 50% from 39% in May 2014.

The USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences/Los Angeles Times poll, conducted by telephone Aug. 29-Sept. 8, found that a vast majority of California voters consider the drought a crisis or major problem. Yet despite brown lawns, idled cropland and plummeting reservoir levels, only 35% said their daily lives had been seriously affected.



They spread around the blame for the state's water supply problems: Foremost, they cited a lack of rain and snow, followed by old delivery systems and insufficient storage, people using too much water, growth, climate change, environmental regulations and agricultural use.

When it comes to solutions, recycling, capturing storm runoff, storing water in aquifers and seawater desalination were the most popular, garnering at least 80% support. Building new dams and reservoirs was backed by 69%.

The least favored approaches were increasing water rates to encourage conservation, supported by 38% compared with 44% a year ago, and suspending environmental protections for fish and wildlife, advocated by 42% compared with 36% a year ago.

"Voters are looking for all of the above solutions as long as all of the above solutions do not raise costs for them personally," said Republican pollster David Kanevsky of American Viewpoint, which conducted the bipartisan survey of 1,500 registered state voters with the Democratic firm Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research. The margin of error is plus or minus 2.8 percentage points, higher for subgroups.

"Given all the investments they want to make to ensure long-term water supply, the job for elected officials is to understand the investments in essence will raise costs," Kanevsky added.

The prolonged drought has highlighted the fact that roughly three-quarters of Californians' water use is by agriculture, which also holds many of the oldest water rights in the state.

Criticized by some for leaving agriculture out of the water-use restrictions issued this year, the Brown administration has pointed out that federal irrigation deliveries were slashed to zero in some parts of the Central Valley for two years in a row. Growers also have had to absorb the expense of drilling new and deeper wells to make up for lost deliveries.

But the poll found a growing backlash against agriculture's enduring thirst. The percentage of voters who said farmers should be required to reduce their water use jumped to 53% from 37% a year ago, a shift that Greenberg pollster Drew Lieberman called "huge."

"People are now in a place where they look around and say we're doing our part.... It doesn't necessarily look like there's an end in sight, and it's time for other people to step up," he said.

Mark Woo, 52, a public policy consultant, was among those survey respondents who support cuts to farmers.

"What can the state sustain between urban use, agricultural use and environmental use?" he wondered.

He isn't just pointing a finger elsewhere. In the last year, Woo said, he, his wife and two teenage sons have pruned their daily household water use to less than 30 gallons per person.

The family's small lawn in the Bay Area community of Kensington is dead. Woo keeps his shrubs and trees alive with water from the bathtub and shower.

"I know I'm well below what I'm required and expected to do," he said. "But I really feel if we can ... try and do as much as we can, it's so important because in the long run, preserving water for the environment is really key as opposed to me watering my yard."

Given a choice between protecting the environment at the expense of water supply or ensuring water supply even if that damages the environment, 50% of those polled favored the environment and 34% picked water supply.

The percentage of those who said the drought had seriously affected them and their families rose to 35% from 22% a year ago and 16% in May 2014. The percentage who said it had a minor impact remained essentially flat at 50%.

"I don't know that going from taking a seven-minute shower to a five-minute shower qualifies as a major impact, or not having showers at the beach when you come off the sand," Lieberman said. "People are still able to drink, they're still able to get clean."

When it comes to El Niño's chances of busting the drought this winter, California voters were hedging their bets: 36% said it would help a lot and 42% said it would help a little. Another 7% said the weather phenomenon would make no difference to the state's water shortage or would even worsen it.

# Calabasas creek restoration underway

## A new trail is also in the works

Source: The Acorn 9/10/15

Plans to build a trail and restore the natural habitat along a 1.5-mile section of Las Virgenes Creek between Agoura and Lost Hills roads in west Calabasas drew mixed responses from residents who attended a public workshop recently at the Agoura/ Calabasas Community Center.

About two-dozen people participated in the discussion. Half were officials representing the city, water district and schools, and the rest comprised residents who live near the creek.

Some attendees were concerned that the new trail would impinge on their privacy; others wanted to make sure the enhancements will primarily benefit fish, birds and other wildlife that rely on the creek bed for shelter and food.

### **Nature demands it**

Alex Farassati, environmental services supervisor for Calabasas, said phase two of the Las Virgenes Creek restoration project will boost property values, improve fish passage and stabilize creek banks that in some areas are failing and have eroded.

The new trail will provide a safe and relaxing walking path for people of all ages and allow them to get near the waterway, which is hard to access as it is cluttered with dead brush and non-native trees.

In 1985, California established an urban streams restoration program to assist communities with restoring their creeks and streams to a more natural state, while making sure the waterways still had the ability to serve as flood-control channels.

Nearly 10 years ago, the City of Calabasas completed a \$1.24-million restoration of Las Virgenes Creek near the Albertsons shopping center on Agoura Road.

The 400-foot portion of the creek was liberated from its concrete shell—installed about four decades ago as a flood-control measure—allowing passersby to see green plants and wildlife instead of graffiti and trash.

The city already secured \$1.5 million from the California Department of Water Resources for phase two to reinstate the urban stream habitat nestled among homes, commercial buildings and a school just east of Lost Hills Road. The project will cost \$2.5 million and the city is working to obtain more grants.

Currently, the creek bed is filled with debris, dead brush and invasive trees that block the flow of water.



In addition to removing blockages and repairing areas affected by erosion, new native riparian species will be planted to create new habitat and improve aesthetics, said Jeff Peters of Questa Engineering. The firm was hired by the city to design the trail and creek restoration project.

The trail will be situated on the west side of the creek, starting behind the tech center south of Agoura Road and continuing to de Anza Park.

The city is considering two options; one with a path meandering right next to the creek and the other closer to homes.

Peters said the lower trail along the creek would be more difficult to construct and maintain as it would be within a floodplain and the topography is more rugged.

Thus, officials prefer the wider path closer to homes as it would provide better clearance for cyclists and people with special needs. The project would include some benches and an educational area near A.E. Wright Middle School.

The new path will close a gap in the regional trail network linking Malibu Creek State Park to the other open spaces north of the 101 Freeway.

The improvement to the creek bed would also reduce the risk of flooding in the area during downpours.

The plan requires approval from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and some federal agencies. While the sheriff's and fire departments and flood control management agencies all want the clearance along the creek, biologists generally prefer to keep the habitat for birds and other wildlife.

"We need to negotiate to get permits, so we need to present a complete package to show benefits to people and wildlife," Peters said.

### **Residents' concerns**

Several residents who live in the Steeplechase townhomes along the creek are worried that the wider trail would be too close to their homes. Theresa Chaides said the city should build the smaller path closer to the creek.

"It just goes with what you're trying to do here, bringing people to the wilderness . . . not look at me drinking coffee in my yard," Chaides said.

Some people were also concerned that increased public access along the creek could attract more vandals and homeless people.

But Peters said trails typically help to reduce crime and loitering because they bring more people to the area and those users can alert authorities if they see a problem.

A number of speakers had mixed feelings about the project.

The wider trail would provide a safer path for bicyclists so they can get to de Anza Park and stay off the road. But at the same time, the concern is for wildlife as more people would flock to the creek bed, which is an informal wildlife corridor, resident John Suwara said.

The city hopes to begin the work\ early next year.



# Camarillo's water use drops below state mandate

Source: Ventura County Star 9/10/15



CAMARILLO, Calif. - The Camarillo City Council on Wednesday received good news that the city's water customers have exceeded its 20 percent water reduction goal imposed by the state for June and July.

About two-thirds of the residents in Camarillo are city water customers, and they reached a 25 percent reduction in June and a 27 percent reduction in July compared to 2013 numbers.

Monitoring by the state began in June.

The city is currently in a Stage 2 water shortage, and that would go to Stage 3 if customers don't meet standards set by the state.

However, the city recently received confirmation from the state that the water conservation goal has been exceeded so far.

"We are in compliance with the governor's mandate at this point, and we appreciate that the community has responded and is working to continue to meet that mandate," said Tom Fox, the city's public works director.

He gave a water conservation update to the council and reiterated that the city started 10 years ago with a drought action plan and implementing strategies, which are benefiting the city.

Because the city was doing so well with water conservation already, the city was given a 20 percent reduction goal, which is lower than many other cities.

Up until June, the city had a total average of only 16 percent reduction.

Fox said that over the last 19 years, the city has invested more than \$40 million into a recycled water program.

Fox said the city uses about two million gallons a day in recycled water, and more customers will be coming online soon.

He also said construction is anticipated to start next year on a desalter plant, which will extract and treat brackish, salty groundwater from the north end of the city.

Fox said that the desalter will help the city replace imported water with a more reliable and local source.

The public works director said the city does have a goal that new water customers do not impact existing customers, and that developers must now present a water availability study showing no impact to water supply before considering approval of a project.

In July, the majority of the council backed away from an ordinance change that would have restricted water service to developments underway in the city. Their action would have limited the issuance of will-serve letters, which allow developers to obtain city water meters for completed projects, until water supply impacts are lifted.

Developers told the council the ordinance would stop numerous projects they've already invested millions of dollars to complete.

But, many residents also spoke to the council, saying it wasn't fair that they had to conserve water when new projects were being approved that would put more of a demand on city water.

At Wednesday's meeting, Camarillo resident Matt Lorimer said the continuation of building in the city doesn't make sense and several council members are just making excuses.

"The bottom line is, we're in a serious drought here. You shouldn't be approving more and more building in Camarillo until the situation is fixed," said Lorimer.

Christine Rangel, director of government affairs for the Building Industry Association chapter for Los Angeles and Ventura counties, also spoke saying that homebuilders are doing everything to combat the drought, and that new homes with water-saving technologies use half as much water as existing homes.

Fox said the city is coming up with strategies regarding development that take into account the temporary water cap set by the governor and that also can be implemented and enforced.

He said city officials want to bring some ideas to the public at a town hall meeting tentatively scheduled for Oct. 5 and bring back a recommendation to the council on Oct. 14.



# Ventura County history surfaces in Lake Casitas

Source: Ventura County Star 9/10/15

OJAI VALLEY, Calif. - Brian Aikens walked along a sandy patch of an old state highway that had spent decades under Lake Casitas.

A white line smudged with mud and shells still marked the middle of old Highway 150, lost to the man-made lake's rising water back in the late 1960s.

But after four years of drought, Ventura County's history has started to surface again.

"It's amazing to see after all these years," Aikens said this week as he saw the highway's white stripe that had cleared the shrinking waterline in recent weeks.

After a short stretch, the road dipped back into shallow water before popping up a short distance away on Arrowhead Island, also called Sunken Island. It's not so sunken anymore.

Over the past few years, Lake Casitas has dropped 63 feet. The shoreline has moved, exposing trees, islands, old roads, a sunken boat and even the site of an old school not seen in decades.

In 34 years here, Aikens, an Ojai Valley Museum board member, has never seen the lake this low, a stark reminder of the drought and need to conserve, he said.

Droughts are nothing new for the area. But the lake — also the area's water supply — has now dropped lower than it has since it was first filled nearly 50 years ago.

Ron Merckling pointed out an old tree standing about 12 feet tall far back from the old highway at the shoreline.

The dropping water level "got to about where the tree was back in 1991, but that was it," said Merckling, public affairs manager for the Casitas Municipal Water District, which owns and manages the lake.

"All of this stuff from where the tree is onward is (above water) for the first time since the 1960s."

### Last Chance Sighting?

On a hot September morning, a few kayaks and boats skimmed through the water nearby — one of the shallowest parts of the lake.

Buoys meant to bob in the water, or that had sunk at some point, sat in dry dirt nearby. A half-dozen or so hollow cement pipes lay scattered nearby.

Several years ago, they were rolled off a barge and into the lake for fish habitat, Merckling said. "Now, it's bird habitat."

He stood looking out at the shallow water off the old highway. "I'm hoping this will be the last time you'll be able to stand here in your lifetime," he said.



Casitas gets no imported water. Instead, it depends on the watershed, rivers and creeks.

In a drought, demand for lake water goes up, as it becomes the backup supplier for other small water agencies in the area. Some are solely dependent on it now.

What's the plan if the lake runs dry?

Merckling said he fields that question a lot these days.

"The plan is that we manage the lake so that never happens," he said. "We will be steadily increasing our conservation mandates as we go along."

Customers are cutting back, he said. But if the drought continues, cuts will have to go deeper.

"This is what we rely on," Merckling said. "This is what we have to manage."

History resurfaces

An old black-and-white photo in the Casitas library shows Highway 150 in 1959. What looks like an old school sits near a bridge over a slowly filling lake at the same spot of road that's now mostly exposed.

OK'd by federal officials in 1956, construction on the dam and lake project was completed three years later. But it took at least a decade before the lake filled.

In the meantime, the old highway continued to be used for several years, even as the state built a new route around the lake.

A 1957 state highways magazine lists a project to grade, pave and relocate around the reservoir about five miles of Highway 150 near Chismahoo Creek. Construction for that phase was estimated to cost \$760,000.

Several years ago, the Ojai Valley Museum gathered details of what was under the lake, studying old maps, books and newspaper and personal accounts.

Back in the late 1800s, Highway 150 was the main route between Ventura and Santa Barbara, Aikens said.

A 1948 map shows Highway 150 looping up along Casitas Pass and crossing Coyote Creek.

A bit farther onshore, another recently surfaced old road — Dunshee Road — heads off to the east from the old highway. A school stood at that corner close to 50 years ago, Aikens said.

The 1920s-era Santa Ana School was built on the edge of Coyote Creek, but along with several ranches disappeared under rising water three decades later.

When the lake level started dropping recently, Aikens found an old teeter-totter seat left behind after the school was razed, he said.

"Who knew that over 50-something years later, that would be still sitting there," Aikens said.

# Weather Channel cuts shows and staff amid uncertain future

Source: LA Times 9/10/15

The Weather Channel is becoming leaner as it faces a cloudy forecast for the future.

The Atlanta-based cable network told employees Wednesday that it is scrapping its general-interest morning show with former "Good Morning America" forecaster Sam Champion on Oct. 30, and will no longer be in the market for unscripted series programs.

The channel is also shutting down its New York-based early-morning show "Wake Up With Al" with Al Roker of NBC's "Today," on Oct. 2. About 50 of the channel's 1,400 employees will lose their jobs as a result of the changes.

"In a world where everyone is chasing new original shows, we need to approach the world differently," Dave Shull, president of the Weather Channel Television Group, wrote in an internal memo. "We need to focus on our unique strength -- and that is the weather."

The channel has already moved toward live programming that will appeal to weather enthusiasts. Last month, it launched a new daily live show done in partnership with Weather Underground, the website aimed at weather geeks who supply much of its local forecast information. Weather Channel parent Weather Co. bought the site in 2012 for an undisclosed price.

Mariska Hargitay, who stars on "Law & Order: SVU" as Olivia Benson, directs an episode of the TV series on Dec. 15 in New York City. (Bobby Bank / GC Images/Getty Images)

The cost-cutting moves come as the Weather Co.'s owners -- NBCUniversal, Bain Capital and Blackstone Group -- are reportedly exploring a possible sale of the asset. A spokesperson declined to comment on the reports or the status of any sale talks.

Once among the most renowned brands in the cable business, the Weather Channel is coping with changing viewer habits brought on by emerging technologies. The channel is losing subscribers because of the growing number of consumers who want smaller, less expensive cable packages or are choosing to forgo cable altogether and get their video entertainment through broadband Internet connections.

According to Nielsen data for August, the Weather Channel reaches 89.3 million satellite and cable subscribers, down 10.6% from the same month in 2013.

The channel will focus more on developing innovations for its storm coverage -- which delivers the channel's highest ratings -- and a new "over-the-top" streaming video service, Shull said.

Champion, who was hired by the Weather Channel in 2014, will remain at the company in a role in its ongoing coverage and the new over-the-top product.

“Sam will continue to play a pivotal role in the future success of the Weather Channel as we head into this new era and remain a key leader for us,” spokesperson Shirley Powell said.

Roker will still appear on the Weather Channel from New York while his co-anchor, Stephanie Abrams, will move back to the channel’s Atlanta studios.

The Weather Channel will air the unscripted series programs it already has in the pipeline, but will not be ordering any new ones.



# Californians hopeful that El Niño will ease drought, poll finds

Source: LA Times 9/10/15



Clouds darken the sky in Santa Clarita this week. Many California voters think El Niño will help alleviate the drought, according to a new USC Dornsife/Los Angeles Times poll.

(Barbara Davidson / Los Angeles Times)

Amid forecasts of a [possibly record-breaking El Niño](#), Californians are being careful not to get their hopes too high that it will finally wash away the state's stubborn drought.

In a new USC Dornsife/Los Angeles Times poll, 36% said an El Niño would help a lot and 42% said it would help a little. An additional 7% said the weather phenomenon would make no difference to the state's water shortage or even worsen it.

Climate scientists have observed building El Niño conditions in the Pacific Ocean all summer. On Thursday, the National Weather Service's Climate Prediction Center said that computer models unanimously favor a strong El Niño. Other forecasters say the chances are good for above average precipitation this winter, welcome news after four withering years.

But state officials, worried that Californians will pull back on water conservation, are stressing that El Niño is no guarantee of a drought-busting winter.

"The fact is that this coming winter could extend our record-dry weather or bring major storms, heavy precipitation and coastal storm surges or a combination of all," state climatologist Michael Anderson said in a statement.

# A monster El Niño is likely, but there are 'no guarantees'

Source: LA Times 9/10/15

El Niño is on track to become one of the most powerful on record, strongly suggesting California could face heavy rainfall this winter, climate scientists say.

But El Niño still hasn't sealed the deal, and there still needs to be a dramatic change in the winds in the Pacific Ocean if it is to be as strong as it might be, said Bill Patzert, climatologist for NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in La Cañada Flintridge.

"It's still very impressive, but it's a marathon with an El Niño," Patzert said. "At 20 miles, do you hit the wall? Or do you pick up the pace?"

At this point, El Niño is strong and could be even stronger than the 1997-98 event, which brought heavy rain and deadly flooding and mudslides across California, and gave the south of the state double its rainfall and the mountains double the snowpack.



The latest government El Niño forecast, issued by the National Weather Service's Climate Prediction Center on Thursday morning, said that computer models unanimously favor a strong El Niño, and that there is a 95% chance that El Niño will continue through the winter -- essential if California is to benefit from increased rainfall as the state experiences its fourth year of punishing drought.

The Climate Prediction Center's deputy director, Mike Halpert, said Thursday that sea-surface temperatures in a benchmark location of the Pacific Ocean are now exceeding 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit above the average. Those are the highest temperatures recorded "for the first time since the end of the 1997-98 El Niño."

"The present El Niño is already one of the strongest on record and is expected to strengthen further through the late fall or early winter months," said Daniel Swain, climate scientist with Stanford University, by email. "At this juncture, the likeliest outcome for California is a wetter-than-average winter."

California could therefore receive stronger storms than typical, especially between December through March, Swain recently wrote in a [blog post](#). And with sea temperatures particularly



warm offshore, that could bring even more atmospheric moisture to fuel storm systems bound for this state.

“All of this suggests that there could be a substantially increased risk of precipitation-related hazards this winter in California, including flooding and landslides,” Swain wrote.

Even worse, the effects of the drought – deaths of trees and ash and debris left behind by wildfires – could increase the risk of mudslides and debris flow this winter.

California has already been feeling the effects of El Niño, with an increased number of hurricanes in the eastern Pacific that have sent intense storms over California this summer. El Niño is a factor in the rising humidity and scattered thunderstorms over the Southland this week, which have arrived from the remnants of Hurricane Linda.

Earlier this summer, storms that arrived from the remnants of Hurricane Dolores were so intense that floods knocked out an Interstate 10 bridge east of Palm Springs and dropped inches of hail on Interstate 80 near Lake Tahoe. El Niño is also believed to have influenced the heavy rains that produced flooding but ended drought conditions in Colorado, Texas and Oklahoma earlier this year.

“This El Niño is already happening and it’s already having impacts,” Patzert said, as warm ocean water from the western Pacific Ocean surges to the Americas.

But for this El Niño to rival the infamous “Godzilla El Niño” of 1997-98, as Patzert calls it, the east-to-west trade winds of the Pacific Ocean along the equator need to dramatically collapse, which would allow the sea near Peru to warm up even further. And that hasn’t happened yet, Patzert said.

“At this point, there’s no guarantees,” Patzert said. “I’m holding off on my apocalyptic rainfall forecast until I see what happens here in the next three months.”

The bottom line? “There’s still some drama here. The curtain has not fallen. We have not put this El Niño in the bank,” Patzert said. “I’m still pretty optimistic, but this is not signed, sealed and delivered. But we’re almost there.”

It's a marathon with an El Niño ... At 20 miles, do you hit the wall? Or do you pick up the pace? - Bill Patzert, NASA JPL climatologist

There has been extraordinary attention on El Niño’s development this summer, as many have saddled the weather phenomenon’s arrival with hopes of bringing relief to the punishing drought affecting much of the American West.

But El Niño can be hard to predict, and tracking it can feel like watching a soap opera, Patzert said, with each one taking different twists and turns.

One reason El Niño hasn’t sealed the deal now is that the trade winds are only slightly weaker than normal.



“My eyeballs are glued to what the trade winds are doing,” Patzert said. “We are still on track to have one of the strongest El Niños on record, but we could get derailed.”

Added Halpert: El Niño in “1997, from this point on, was really quite extraordinary, particularly in the low-level winds. And at least so far, we have not seen anything even resembling 1997 in the wind field over the last couple of weeks.”

Experts are also warning that while more rainfall would certainly be welcome, there is virtually no hope that one rainy winter could reverse the severe effects of the four-year drought. It would take years of above-average rain and snow to end the drought and refill empty reservoirs and wells, experts say.

“Californians should continue to use water carefully and sparingly in the face of the ongoing extreme drought,” state climatologist Michael L. Anderson said in a statement. “Californians should not count on El Niño to end the drought.”

# Golden State Water announces lawn contest

Source: Ventura County Star 9/9/15



OJAI, Calif. - Ojai and Simi Valley water customers could win up to \$100 off their bill this month by sharing photos of their unwatered lawns via email or on social media.

Golden State Water Co., the firm that supplies water to the city of Ojai and portions of Simi Valley, has launched a “Golden Lawn Contest” to encourage water conservation amid California’s severe drought.

The contest, hosted in partnership with statewide conservation education program Save Our Water, aims to highlight customers that have stopped or limited outdoor irrigation.

Contestants are invited to submit photos of their golden lawns through Sep. 29 via email at [contest@gswater.com](mailto:contest@gswater.com) or on Twitter to [@GoldenStateH2O](https://twitter.com/GoldenStateH2O) using the #GoGoldCA hashtag.

The first and second prizewinners, selected from Golden State Water customers throughout the state, will receive a \$100 and a \$50 credit on their water bills, respectively. Prizes will be awarded Sept. 30.

Outdoor irrigation accounts for the bulk of residential water use in California. Golden State Water customers in Ojai and Simi Valley are currently limited to two days of outdoor watering a week.

“This contest is a great opportunity to both recognize customers who are using water responsibly and embrace lawns that have gone gold,” Denise Kruger, a senior vice president for Golden State Water, said in a statement.

All photos submitted may be highlighted on the Golden State Water and Save Our Water websites, or on the organizations’ Twitter feeds.

# Fillmore to tap fourth well for water

Source: Ventura County Star 9/9/15



FILLMORE, Calif - The city of Fillmore relies on three wells to supply all of its water. When one of them had to be shut down last month for emergency repairs, the other two were able to fill the city's demand, but things looked a bit dicey. If one of the remaining two wells had broken down, Fillmore residents would have faced mandatory cutbacks.

To keep that from happening, the city is moving toward putting a fourth well into production and drawing up plans to drill a fifth. On Tuesday night, the City Council voted unanimously to hire a firm to test the water in the city's fourth well — known as Well No. 9 — located on Third Street in northwest Fillmore.

The city drilled the well in 2010, but has never used it. Before it can be used, the city needs to pump some water and analyze it to make sure it's up to drinking water standards. The city estimates that it will pay an outside firm about \$80,000 to pump and test the water.

"The city was simultaneously going through a financial and organizational crisis, and they shut the project down," City Engineer Michael Lapraik said in an interview before the council meeting.

The testing should be finished by early November, Lapraik told the council in a written report. If the results are good, the well can then go into production.

The city doesn't actually need a fourth well to meet its current demand, which is about 2.2 million gallons per day, Lapraik said. But a fourth well gives Fillmore the capacity to do repairs on one well without worrying about putting undue stress on the system.

"With only three wells, when one of them goes down it puts us almost in a crisis mode. We lose our redundancy," Lapraik said. "It's not a position you want to be in with your potable water system. When you lose a third of your capacity, the remaining two wells have to work harder to compensate, and if anything should happen to one of those, then you've got a problem on your hands."



The city's fifth well — known as Well No. 10 — is still in the planning stages and is planned for Dolores Day Park. It will be necessary to accommodate Fillmore's growth in the future, Lapraik said. The city now has about 15,000 residents, and it plans to add about 3,000 more over the next 10 years.

Fillmore relies entirely on local groundwater for its water supply. The drought has had an effect on the aquifer, but the city still has access to all the water it needs, Lapraik said.

It does have to drill deeper than it used to, though. The water table is at about 83 feet down. Wells work better when they reach farther into the water table, so Fillmore's wells now pump from 175 feet down, 20 feet deeper than before the drought, Lapraik said.

# Extreme California weather: Heat, floods and thunderstorms

Source: LA Times 9/8/15



California is in store for extreme weather this week, with excessive heat advisories expected to last into the weekend while deadly riptides, flash floods and thunderstorms could bring their own hazards to the state.

In Southern California's valleys and deserts, temperatures are forecast to climb up to 105 degrees, prompting an excessive heat warning that will last until Saturday, said Andrew Rorke, a National Weather Service senior forecaster.

But the Santa Ana winds that usually come in September aren't around this week, Rorke said, producing a kind of baking effect across the region that will continue at night. There will be little to no wind, and unusually warm ocean temperatures aren't allowing the air to cool as much so there won't be any relief after the sun goes down, he said. Temperatures will dip only into the 70s, he said.

Inland, meanwhile, it's not just the heat that residents have to worry about. Monsoonal moisture flowing north from west of Baja could bring a heavy dose of rain, sparking warnings that flash floods and thunderstorms could be possible over the next three or four days in the Riverside and San Bernardino county mountains, forecasters say.

Temperatures could hover in the 90s at the coast, which is excessively warm for the beaches, Rorke said. Riptides continue to swirl along the shoreline, making it dangerous to go in the water.

But the extreme weather isn't just a Southern California issue this week.

In the northern half of the state, triple-digit temperatures with low humidity are prompting warnings of an elevated fire danger in state and national forests. Temperatures could climb to 108 degrees in Lake County, which has been battered by several wildfires this year.

In the San Francisco area, temperatures could top out in the 90s downtown and 105 degrees farther inland, the National Weather Service said.

# Drilling boom brings rising number of harmful waste spills

Source: Ventura County Star 9/8/15



CROSSROADS, N.M. (AP) - Carl Johnson and son Justin are third- and fourth-generation ranchers who for decades have battled oilfield companies that left a patchwork of barren earth where the men graze cattle in the high plains of New Mexico. Blunt and profane, they stroll across a 1 1/2-acre patch of sandy soil - lifeless, save for a scattering of stunted weeds.

Five years ago, a broken pipe soaked the land with as much as 420,000 gallons of oilfield wastewater - a salty and potentially toxic drilling byproduct that can quickly turn fertile land into a dead zone. The leaked brine killed every sprig of grama and bluestem grasses and shinnery shrubs it touched.

For the Johnsons, the spill is among dozens that have taken a heavy toll: a landscape pockmarked with spots where livestock can no longer graze, legal fees running into the tens of thousands and worries about the safety of the area's underground aquifer.

"If we lose our water, that ruins our ranch," Justin Johnson said. "That's the end of the story."

Their plight illustrates a largely overlooked side effect of oil and gas production that has worsened with the past decade's drilling boom: spills of wastewater that foul the land, kill wildlife and threaten freshwater supplies.

An Associated Press analysis of data from leading oil- and gas-producing states found more than 180 million gallons of wastewater spilled from 2009 to 2014 in incidents involving ruptured pipes, overflowing storage tanks and other mishaps or even deliberate dumping. There were some 21,651 individual spills. And these numbers are incomplete because many releases go unreported.

Though oil spills tend to get more attention, wastewater spills can be more damaging. And in seven of the 11 states the AP examined, the amount of wastewater released was at least twice that of oil discharged.



Spilled oil, however unsightly, over time is absorbed by minerals in the soil or degraded by microbes. Not so with the wastewater - also known as brine, produced water or saltwater. Unless thoroughly cleansed, a costly and time-consuming process, salt-saturated land dries up. Trees die. Crops cannot take root.

"Oil spills may look bad, but we know how to clean them up and ... return the land to a productive state," said Kerry Sublette, a University of Tulsa environmental engineer and specialist in treating the despoiled landscapes. "Brine spills are much more difficult."

In addition to the extreme salinity, the fluids often contain heavy metals such as arsenic and mercury, plus radioactivity. Even smaller discharges affecting an acre or two gradually add up for landowners - "death by a thousand bee stings," said Don Shriber of Farmington, New Mexico, a cattleman who wrangled with an oil company over damage.

For animals, the results can be fatal. Ranchers, including Melvin Reed of Shidler, Oklahoma, said they have lost cattle that lapped up the liquids or ate tainted grass.

"They get real thin. It messes them up," Reed said. "Sometimes you just have to shoot them."

The AP obtained data from regulatory agencies in Texas, North Dakota, California, Alaska, Colorado, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Wyoming, Kansas, Utah and Montana - states that account for more than 90 percent of the nation's onshore oil production. Officials in ninth-ranking oil producer Louisiana and second-ranking gas producer Pennsylvania said they could not provide comprehensive spill data.

The spill total increased each year, along with oil and gas production. In 2009, there were 2,470 reported spills in the 11 states; by 2014, the total was 4,643. The amount of wastewater spilled doubled from 21.1 million gallons in 2009 to 43 million in 2013 before dipping to 37.6 million last year.

The extent of land or water contamination is unknown; state and federal regulators make no such assessments. Texas, the nation's biggest oil and gas producer, had the most incidents, 4,783, and the highest volume spilled, 62 million gallons.

Industry groups and regulators said much of the waste is recovered during cleanup operations or contained by berms near wells. Still, they acknowledged a certain amount soaks into the ground and can flow into waterways.

"You're going to have spills in an industrial society," said Katie Brown, spokeswoman for Energy In Depth, a research and education arm of the Independent Petroleum Association of America. "But there are programs in place to reduce them."

Wastewater spills have dogged the oil industry from its earliest days more than a century ago, borne witness by barren sites from the Great Plains to the Pacific. A notorious symbol is the "Texon scar," where brine from a well drilled in 1923 near that tiny West Texas town created a desolate 2,000-acre swath dotted with dead mesquite trees. Efforts to restore the land continue to this day, said range conservationist Joe Petersen.

Concentrated brine, much saltier than seawater, exists naturally in rock formations thousands of feet underground, a remnant of prehistoric oceans. When oil and gas are pumped to the surface, the water comes too, along with fluids and chemicals injected to crack open rock - the process known as hydraulic fracturing. Production of methane gas from coal deposits also generates wastewater, but it is less salty and harmful.

The spills usually occur as oil and gas are channeled to metal tanks for separation from the wastewater, and the water is delivered to a disposal site - usually an injection well that pumps it back underground. Pipelines, tank trucks and pits are potential weak points.

Accidents range from the mundane to the freakish; in 2010, a storage tank near Ardmore, Oklahoma, overflowed after a snake slithered into a panel box and blew a fuse. Most spills are caused by equipment malfunction or human error, according to state reports reviewed by the AP.

Though no full accounting of damage exists, the scope is sketched out in a sampling of incidents:

- In North Dakota, a spill of nearly 1 million gallons in 2006 caused a massive die-off of fish, turtles and plants in the Yellowstone River and a tributary. Cleanup costs approached \$2 million. Two larger spills since then scoured vegetation along an almost 2-mile stretch and fouled a creek and a river.

- Wastewater from unlined pits seeped beneath a 6,000-acre cotton and nut farm near Bakersfield, California, and contaminated groundwater. Oil giant Aera Energy was ordered in 2009 to pay \$9 million to grower Fred Starrh, who had to remove 2,000 acres from production.

- Brine leaks exceeding 40 million gallons over decades on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation in Montana polluted a river, private wells and the municipal water system in Poplar. "It was undrinkable," said resident Donna Whitmer. "If you shook it up, it'd look all orange." Under a 2012 settlement with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, oil companies paid \$320,000 for new water wells and other improvements. Drinking water tainted with oilfield brine can cause high blood pressure, dehydration and other health risks, EPA spokeswoman Sarah Teschner said.

- In Fort Stockton, Texas, officials in February accused oil company Bugington Energy of illegally dumping 3 million gallons of wastewater in pastures. Paul Weatherby, general manager of the Middle Pecos Groundwater Conservation District, said he fears contamination of the area's groundwater table. The district levied a \$130,000 fine but the company hasn't paid, contending the district overstepped its authority.

- A pipeline joint failure caused flooding on Don Stoker's ranch near Snyder, Texas, in November 2012 and turned his hackberry shade trees into skeletons. Vacuum trucks sucked up some saltwater and the oil company paid damages, but Stoker said his operation was in turmoil. "I had to stay out there three days and watch them while they were getting the saltwater out, to make sure they didn't totally destroy the whole area."



Government agencies acknowledge having a limited view of the accidents, which often happen in remote places and, unlike oil spills, don't produce dramatic images of birds flailing in black goo and tourist beaches fouled. Regulators rely on private operators to notify them, and it's not always required. For example, Oklahoma exempts reporting of most spills of less than 10 barrels, or 420 gallons.

The loudest whistleblowers are often property owners, who must allow drilling access to their land if they don't own the mineral rights.

"Most ranchers are very attached to the land," said Jeff Henry, president of the Osage County Cattlemen's Association in Oklahoma. "It's where we derive our income, raise our families. It's who we are."

A big reason why there are so many spills is the sheer volume of wastewater extracted: about 10 barrels for every barrel of oil, according to an organization of state ground water agencies, or more than 840 billion gallons a year.

Sometimes, the exact cause is never determined. The Johnsons have yet to learn why an underground line ruptured in at least two places on the state-owned land they lease for ranching. A salty, oily odor wafted heavily on the breeze when Justin Johnson reached the site in October 2010.

"I was just totally and thoroughly disgusted," he said.

New Mexico Salt Water Disposal Co. acknowledged responsibility. No fines were levied because the leak was accidental. Vice President Rory McGinn blamed practices and materials the company no longer uses, saying in an interview that "an enormous amount of money" has gone into upgrades.

The company said much the same in 2005 after earlier spills, telling the state in a letter obtained through a records request it had spent nearly \$250,000 on higher-grade pipe, tanks and valves and "our objective and goal is to be 100 percent maintenance and environmentally safe in our operation."

The company has had a dozen spills since 2003, said Larry Behrens of the New Mexico Department of Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources.

Despite such incidents, relatively few farmers and ranchers complain publicly. Some get royalty checks for wells on their property. Others don't want to be seen as opposing an industry that is the economic backbone of their communities.

"If they treat us right, we're all friends of oil," said Mike Artz, a grower in North Dakota's Bottineau County who lost a five-acre barley crop in 2013 after a saltwater pipeline rupture. "But right now, it's just a horse running without the bridle."

Oil and gas developers said they have everything to gain from stopping spills, which cost them money for cleanup and soil restoration.



Sara Hughes, spokeswoman for pipeline operator Kinder Morgan, said her company has lowered water injection pressure and installed additional leak-detection devices on its lines since its spill on Stoker's land.

"We are committed to public safety, protection of the environment and operation of our facilities in compliance with all applicable rules and regulations," Hughes said.

In North Dakota, where the spills increased at a higher rate than the well count during the boom years of 2009-'14, pipelines near waterways must have leak prevention devices but not those elsewhere; critics said that shows the oil industry's political clout. Lynn Helms, director of the North Dakota Department of Mineral Resources, said more devices would be costly and wouldn't necessarily catch small leaks.

Tessa Sandstrom, of the North Dakota Petroleum Council, said the industry is cooperating with scientists studying prevention and land restoration. When spills do happen, she said, most are cleaned up within a year.

But Bottineau County grain farmer Daryl Peterson said it took years of prodding before regulators ordered an oil company to dig up 300 truckloads of tainted soil on his property and replace it. The soil is still salty, he said.

Sublette, the University of Tulsa engineer, said soil excavation and replacement is unreliable because some operators "bring in the nastiest stuff they can find." He recommends extensive flushing with fresh water to remove salts from the zone where plants take root, then rebuilding the soil with nurturing additives. Even done correctly, it can take years to get plants growing again.

Similar methods were used on the Johnsons' pastures, but father and son said the land has not come back to life.

"It will never, ever be like it was," Justin Johnson said, giving a bleached-white stone a desultory kick. "It will never fully recover."

# Salinas Valley's thriving crops mask fears over the area's lone water source

Source: LA Times 9/7/15



Drought has drained Lake Nacimiento, seen from a campground in July, in central California's Salinas Valley, stressing the region's groundwater basin, its only water source. (Michael Robinson Chavez / Los Angeles Times)

In this farming valley, often known as "America's salad bowl," the climate is cool and consistent, the soil is fertile, and an abundance of water has allowed a diverse set of crops to flourish.

Farmers here produce almost two-thirds of the nation's lettuce and half of its broccoli and celery. One town calls itself the artichoke capital of the world.

It is also a place that has seemed to be immune to the state's pervasive drought.

For Rick Antle, the shortage in his fields this summer is of workers, not water. Harvest machines roar to life as 2,000 people cut, wrap and pack thousands of boxes of lettuce each day for Tanimura & Antle, a major family-run farm. They could use 120 more workers.

At a time when lakes have hit bottom, wells have run dry, and farmland 100 miles away in the Central Valley has gathered dust, the Salinas Valley remains an oasis — a green patchwork quilt of farmland unfurling roughly 90 miles along U.S. 101 north of Paso Robles to Monterey Bay, where the Salinas River meets the ocean.

But the verdant landscape hides long-term troubles with the region's only water source.

Unlike the Central Valley, which depends on snowmelt transported from faraway reservoirs, the Salinas Valley has prospered for decades relying solely on the groundwater hundreds of feet below.

Isolated from state and federal aqueducts, the region can't afford to run out of local water. Changes need to be made, but agreement on what to do and how to pay for it has been elusive.

"The problems of other areas is they have no water," said Norm Groot, executive director of the Monterey County Farm Bureau. "Our problem here is we still have water. And to some degree, that presents a different set of challenges."

Foremost among them is how to preserve the massive, but overdrafted, aquifer — one of the most stressed groundwater basins in the state, according to the California Department of Water Resources.

No one knows exactly how deep it goes or how much water is left. A county report estimates there are about 5.3 trillion gallons of water stored underground. About 3% to 4% of that amount is pumped out each year.

"It's a good aquifer, it's really deep, but we're essentially slowly mining it over time," said Michael Cahn, a University of California water resources advisor who helps local farmers improve irrigation. "The reality is, you can't take too much out."

The overdraft is not obvious. Unlike parts of the Central Valley, where the clay soil sinks as water is pumped out, the Salinas Valley's more porous soil tends to maintain its form, Cahn said.

But the soil presents a different problem: saltwater intrusion. The more fresh water is drawn out, the more room for seawater to flow in and contaminate the remaining supply.

In the 1950s and '60s, Lake Nacimiento and Lake San Antonio were built to help push back seawater by replenishing the groundwater through the Salinas River. Creating this water system enabled the valley to produce all its varied crops despite its many microclimates, officials said.

But the drought has drained the reservoirs — San Antonio is down to 4% of capacity — stressing the aquifer even more. Wells are starting to go dry in some areas, and seawater continues to push into farmland near the coast.

"The problem is, where is that breaking point?" said Bardin Bengard, whose family has farmed here since the 1850s, when the valley was mostly cattle and grain. "Our main water supply is underground. It's not like you've got a reservoir where you can just look at it and go, 'It's empty.'"

Bengard's family has seen how water transformed the region. After cattle, it was sugar beets, white beans and potatoes. Today, it's mass production of leafy greens and strawberries. Agriculture contributes about \$8.1 billion a year to the economy, according to a recent county report.

"We're so lucky in Salinas," said his daughter Bridget, who manages the family's celery fields. "You can't farm any of this stuff here, for as long as the season, anywhere else in the world."

The Bengards worry about water quality. And how much longer this way of life can last.

Our main water supply is underground. It's not like you've got a reservoir where you can just look at it and go, 'It's empty.' - Bardin Bengard, whose family has farmed in the Salinas Valley since the 1850s



In 2013, they lost a well because it got salty. Then two other wells needed to be replaced — at \$500,000 each. But such problems don't compare to what they faced at their San Joaquin Valley operation, where they had to fallow 1,000 acres of cotton after even their backup drought plan failed.

The Bengards know there are few backups to count on in the Salinas Valley, so like other farmers in the region, they're thinking ahead. Instead of traditional flooding methods, 80% of their crops are on drip tape, which feeds water directly to the roots.

Agriculture would be harder hit right now if it weren't for these water-saving efforts and a number of infrastructure projects already in place.

"One dry year is not that devastating, because we've been prepared for decades," said Groot, the farm bureau executive. "This saltwater intrusion issue really scared the community into reacting and doing something and paying for some fairly big projects that were way ahead of their time."

A \$75-million project in 1998 began treating sewage to irrigate 12,000 acres of farmland near the coast. Taking many of these farmers off groundwater was a monumental step in slowing the seawater intrusion, officials said.

In 2010, two inflatable rubber dams were installed to capture more rain during wet months. Officials could then release this extra water and move it through the Salinas River to where it needs to be.

Releasing about 1,200 acre-feet per day keeps the seawater from creeping farther inland, said Robert Johnson, deputy general manager of the Monterey County Water Resources Agency.

This worked for two years, he said, but officials could release only 60 acre-feet per day last year and about 130 this year. Many farmers have argued that more water needs to be released, while officials cite the need to store some water in the event of another dry winter.

It's not easy coming to a consensus on what still needs to be done, in part because of geography. Farmers closest to the coast worry more about seawater contamination, while those farther south, where the climate is hotter and the soil different, are concerned about access to enough water. Fish and other environmental issues are also at play, and even though the valley is largely agricultural, there is an urban population that needs to be considered.

There's talk of increasing storage by building a tunnel between the two reservoirs. Using more recycled wastewater is also a possibility, although this gets tricky when drought-conscious residents are flushing their toilets less.

And looming over everything is Gov. Jerry Brown's mandate to form a groundwater sustainability agency by 2017 to regulate pumping. In the Salinas Valley, where agriculture uses about 90% of the water, the question boils down to: Who will control the groundwater basin?

Groot, who represents about 400 farms, acknowledged there will be changes to the rules and the cost of water in the years ahead. But, he added: "We want to have a sustainability agency that recognizes we've done a lot already."

Experts say there needs to be stronger regulation of wells and a clearer understanding of how much water the region actually has. County officials are working on a more detailed groundwater estimate, which will be completed in the next few years.

Until then, hope in El Niño is the more popular answer. Farmers remind one another that in past storms Lake Nacimiento filled up in a matter of days.

"Everything cycles," said Antle, whose family has farmed in the valley for generations. "It's going to rain this year."

# Las Virgenes Water District Releases Proposed New Rate Structure

Source: Las Virgenes Enterprise Newspaper



Las Virgenes Municipal Water District (LVMWD) has mailed notifications to customers of a proposed five-year rate package for 2016 through 2020. The comprehensive proposal *Las Virgenes Water District Releases Proposed New Rate Structure* includes the implementation of a “water budget” rate structure and revisions to the charges for potable water, recycled water and sanitation services.

Under the new rate structure, each customer will receive a monthly water budget based on the number of people in the household, amount of irrigated area and any special needs that may apply, such as those for medical purposes or large animals. The budgeted amounts will change from month-to-month depending on the weather to reflect seasonal differences in needs for outdoor watering. Sanitation charges are proposed based on the number of people living in the household.

The proposed rates reflect increases in the cost of purchasing water from the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, LVMWD’s sole source of potable water, which is also its largest single expense. The “readiness to serve” charge for potable water is proposed to increase over the five-year period to recover a greater percentage of LVMWD’s fixed costs, which are associated with providing reliable service. The volumetric charges for water are also proposed to increase but by a comparatively smaller amount. Under the proposed rate structure, sanitation rates for small households may actually go down, reflecting the relatively low amount of wastewater generated by these customers.

LVMWD General Manager David W. Pedersen said, “The water budget rate structure will drive an efficiency ethic for LVMWD’s customers. Those who stay within their budgets will pay the lowest rates. Wasteful users will pay proportionally more, including the cost of conservation programs aimed to save water.” The new rates will also help to provide improved revenue stability by covering a larger percentage of LVMWD’s fixed costs with fixed revenue. Mr. Pedersen explained, “We are not in the business of selling water; we are in the business of providing reliable service. The rate proposal reflects this important paradigm shift.”



Unlike previous rate adjustments, the conversion to water budgets affects customers differently, depending on whether they use water efficiently or not, and does not lend itself well to making broad percentage comparisons with current rates. In general, most customers will experience an increase in their overall bill; however, some customers will notice a relatively small change or even a decrease. To aid customers in comparing their specific proposed rates under the new structure to their existing rates, a rate estimation calculator and comparison tool is available at [www.LVMWD.com/WaterBudgetRates](http://www.LVMWD.com/WaterBudgetRates).

Announcement of the proposed rate package follows two years of research and analysis. The new rate structure directly links rates to the cost of providing service, consistent with the requirements of Proposition 218 as interpreted by recent court decisions. Mr. Pedersen added, "If the rate package is adopted as proposed, our survey shows that a typical LVMWD customer will continue to enjoy the lowest overall rates in the region." LVMWD has scheduled two informational meetings on the proposed rate package:

- W e d n e s d a y September 30th at the Agoura Hills Event Center, 29900 Ladyface Court in Agoura Hills from 6:30 – 8:00 p.m.
- W e d n e s d a y, October 7th at the Agoura Hills-Calabasas Community Center, 27040 Malibu Hills Road in Calabasas from 6:30 to 8:00 p.m.

Release of the proposed rate package marks the beginning of a 45-day (minimum) public review period before the new rates can be adopted. The LVMWD Board of Directors has scheduled a public hearing to accept comments on the proposed rate package for 6:00 p.m. on Monday, October 26<sup>th</sup> at District Headquarters, 4232 Las Virgenes Road, Calabasas. If adopted as proposed, the new rates would become effective on January 1, 2016. LVMWD's last major rate change was in 2012, with incremental increases from Metropolitan Water District of Southern California passed through to customers last year.