



CITY NOTES

January 2, 2014

Pray for Rain!

2013 was the driest year on record for Fort Bragg. A mere 11 inches of rainfall was recorded in Fort Bragg during the last calendar year. In this rainfall "season" (i.e., since last July 1), the City has received less than 5 inches of rain. Average seasonal rainfall to date is more than 20 inches, and the average for a full season is more than 40 inches of rain. In the 2012-13 rainfall season, Fort Bragg received only 22 inches of rain, which is about the same as the lowest season on record (1976). With back-to-back drought years, water purveyors and users throughout northern California are justifiably concerned.

The United States Geologic Survey (USGS) gauging station on the Noyo River has recorded a flow of about 5 cubic feet per second (cfs) for the past several weeks, spiking to 9 cfs during the rains last weekend. Normal flows in the Noyo at this time of year (based on 60+ years of data) are about 200 cfs. To date, the City of Fort Bragg has been able to keep its water storage and supplies at full capacity. While we are only pumping from the Noyo for a few hours each day, we have continued to draw from our Newman Gulch water source, which is typically turned off at this time of year as winter rains result in high levels of high tannins in the Newman water. Furthermore, this is the time of year when the City's water usage is at its lowest. Water demand spikes considerably during the summer months when tourists are in town and folks use water for irrigation and other seasonal uses.

Coast residents should be concerned about the lack of rainfall. Many of our neighbors who rely on wells are out of water. The City has been selling "surplus" water to fill tankers to fill water tanks and help keep toilets flushing outside of our boundaries. But as soon as we experience any difficulty in keeping our system recharged, water sales will be suspended... and then what?

The City is taking a number of steps to address its immediate and long-term water needs. On a day-to-day basis, the City's very capable Treatment Operators manage diversions from the City's three water sources to ensure that water supplies keep pace with demands. As spring arrives and the forests along our rivers and streams leaf out, the trees will begin using water, leaving even less for our municipal water system. At that time, conserving water and managing water demands will be extremely important.

City staff is taking a critical look at the City's Water Conservation Ordinance to make sure that we can effectively implement incremental stages of voluntary and/or mandatory water conservation measures to align water consumption with impacted water supplies. The City Council will consider revisions to the City's ordinance in March and, unless the rainfall situation dramatically changes, we expect to be implementing a water conservation program in late spring or early summer.

In the long run, the City has plans to increase its water storage. We are in the middle of the permitting process for the proposed Summers Lane Reservoir project. This is a small pond (less than three acres in size and 20 feet deep) that is proposed on the City-owned Newman Gulch property at

the end of Summers Lane. The Summers Lane Reservoir will help the City serve its existing customers in the late summer months when consumer demand peaks and supplies wane.

The City of Fort Bragg also has contracted with an engineering hydrologist to prepare a water supply and demand model to enable us to evaluate our ability to serve existing and potential future customers under various drought scenarios. It is imperative that the City manages its water resources and future growth to ensure that adequate water is available to meet public health and safety needs.

City staff will provide regular updates to the public and to the City Council regarding our water supplies and the steps that are being taken to prevent critical shortages. In the meantime, we can all pray for rain!

City Notes is published on the first and third Thursday of each month. If you have questions or suggestions regarding the column, feel free to contact City Manager Linda Ruffing at (707) 961-2823, ext. 118 or LRuffing@fortbragg.com.