



## CITY NOTES

October 8, 2015

---

### STAGE 3 WATER EMERGENCY - FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Fort Bragg residents and businesses have stepped up to the task of significantly reducing daily water use. Before the Stage 3 Water Emergency was declared last Wednesday, the City's total daily water use was averaging about 600,000 gallons per day (gpd). Since then, we have averaged about 530,000 gpd, and we expect more savings as time goes on. You can track the City's daily water use and obtain more information on the City's website- [city.fortbragg.com](http://city.fortbragg.com), click on Stage 3 Water Emergency button. Thank you to everyone for doing your part in conserving water during this extraordinary water emergency!

**Where does Fort Bragg's water come from?** Fort Bragg has three surface water sources. The Noyo River is the City's primary water source. Water is diverted from the river at a location a couple of miles upstream from the river mouth. The City's other two water sources are at Newman Gulch (a tributary to the Noyo) and Waterfall Gulch (a tributary to Hare Creek). These two streams typically provide about half of the City's water.

**Why is Fort Bragg in a Water Emergency?** All three of the City's water sources are at historic lows as a result of four years of drought. In recent weeks, flows on the Noyo have dropped below 0.3 cubic feet per second (cfs)- the lowest flows ever recorded on the river. The City's diversion is in a part of the river that is subject to tidal influence and, with the flows so low, the freshwater has been unable to push back the saltwater to a level where the raw water can be processed by our treatment plant. Normally, water from the Noyo diversion has a total dissolved solids (TDS) level of less than 100 parts per million (ppm). Last Wednesday morning, the TDS level at the Noyo diversion skyrocketed to above 2,000 ppm. We had to shut off the pumps, but since then have been able to draw some water from the river.

**Why doesn't Fort Bragg just use other water?** The City does not have other water to use. The City is diverting as much as it can from its Newman and Waterfall sources, but Noyo River water is essential at this time of year. It is also the case that the City has very little water storage. Unlike many locations that rely on reservoirs for summer water, Fort Bragg relies on year-round pumping from its three sources. The storage that the City has (three tanks, two raw water ponds, and a small reservoir) is sufficient to keep the system pressurized, ensure adequate fire flows, and provide a backup should a major water main break. The storage is not a buffer for extended water shortfalls. Fort Bragg needs to obtain as much water as it uses each day.

**Could Fort Bragg really run out of water?** Yes. Though we are doing absolutely everything we can do to ensure that we do not run out of water! Reducing the amount of water that is used on a daily basis is imperative. Our businesses and residents have done a remarkable job in lowering their water consumption. Still, with no rain in sight, it is possible that Noyo River flows will diminish to a point where we cannot pump any water from it. We are also making plans for delivering water from other water sources to keep our system fully charged if necessary.

**Shouldn't we have been saving water earlier this summer?** Because we cannot store water, conservation earlier in the summer would not have changed the current situation. That said, implementing water conservation measures should be a way of life for everyone living in drought-stricken California. Fort Bragg residents and businesses are already among the lowest per capita water users in the state.

**Why has Fort Bragg continued to approve permits for new development?** Our biggest water users include the brewery, the hospital, lodging, laundromats, fish-packing houses, and grocery stores. These are major employers and services that are vital to our local economy. The City has had very little new development in recent years due to the Great Recession. As the development cycle picks up, the City will need to carefully evaluate its ability to serve new development with its limited water resources. The City must also continue to seek new water sources and additional storage.

**What's up with the Summers Lane Reservoir project?** The City is in the final stages of permitting for the Summers Lane Reservoir project. Emergency drought funding was received from the State in 2014 and the necessary State permits for the reservoir have taken longer than anticipated. The timber harvest on the reservoir site is currently underway. We plan to bid the project this winter and construct the reservoir as early in the spring as possible. The reservoir will provide 45 acre-feet of storage (more than 14.5 million gallons) which will go a long way towards helping the City through late summer and fall dry periods. By this time next year, we will have more than two months of stored water.

**What else is the City doing to ensure a sufficient water supply?** Last year, the City attempted to purchase the MCRPD's property on Highway 20 to protect the upper Newman Gulch watershed and for future water source development. The concept was for a well system similar to that planned for the golf course to feed into the City's raw water system at Newman Gulch. The purchase agreement fell through when the property's value was not enough to resolve the MCRPD's bankruptcy. The City is now investigating other potential groundwater wells to supplement its current water sources.

**Is it really necessary for restaurants to use disposable dinnerware?** The City's recently enacted Water Conservation ordinance requires that restaurants use disposable dinnerware during a Stage 3 Water Emergency. The City has received a lot of feedback and information from restaurants that suggests that there may be more effective water-saving options. The City Council will be considering an urgency ordinance (i.e., one that takes effect immediately) to modify the City's Water Conservation ordinance at the Tuesday, October 13<sup>th</sup> City Council meeting. Various modifications will be considered including: eliminating the disposable dinnerware requirement and allowing restaurants to figure out their own methods for water conservation; prohibiting car washing except at commercial car wash facilities (both of which have water recycling systems); prohibiting the use of hot tubs and in-room spas at lodging establishments; and authorizing the City to install flow restrictors if necessary to achieve conservation requirements. The public is welcome to attend the Council meeting and to provide input. The City Council will meet at Fort Bragg Town Hall at 6 PM on Tuesday, October 13<sup>th</sup> (in observance of the Columbus Day holiday).

*City Notes is published on the second and fourth 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 [L.Ruffing@fortbragg.com](mailto:L.Ruffing@fortbragg.com).*