

## California Drought Update

Written by Robert McDonald, General Manager

The winter of 2021 was dry, and it looks like 2022 may bring a dry winter as well according to the NWS Weather Prediction Center. According to the Center, this year's winter is under a La Nina watch which could mean a dry winter. Our water supplies have already been impacted from the recent dry conditions, and we will have to carefully balance our supplies to sustain us through the next few years. We are asking that customers use water wisely and conserve water when possible, as we enter this unpredictable territory. With 50 of 58 counties in California in a drought state of emergency as of the writing of this article, it is important now more than ever to "make conservation a California way of life".

In addition to the more recent dry conditions, we never completely emerged from the drought that started in 2011. In the last decade, we have only received two years with above average rainfall in Santa Barbara County. What we are experiencing right now is not a "new" drought, but rather an extension of this long-term dry period. We have not received adequate rainfall to allow for our groundwater supplies and Lake Cachuma to fully recover from the dry winters of 2012 to 2016. We have hoped for "March miracles" and above average winters to boost annual rainfall totals and replenish our supplies but were greeted with blue skies and below average rainfall for numerous years. We were excited in 2017 and 2019 when Carpinteria received 17.12 inches and 21.59 inches of annual rainfall respectively, but it was not enough to make up for the lack of rain we received previously. Right now, we need several years of above average precipitation to get us out of the deficit caused by numerous dry years.

In early July, Governor Gavin Newsom called on California residents to cut back on their water consumption as we continue to experience dry weather and high temperatures. Santa Barbara County is one of the counties in a regional drought state of emergency. Generally, during dry periods, we get water from the State Water Project to help supplement our local water supplies and reduce strain on our groundwater basin, but with the entire state facing water shortages this is not the case. Lake Oroville, the State Water Project's largest reservoir, is now at its historic lowest level at 638 feet as of August 10th. The last historic low recorded for the lake was 645.11 feet in 1977, which at the time was considered the state's worst drought. Levels have dropped so low that Oroville's Hyatt Power Plant was taken offline for the first time ever because water levels approached the minimum level to generate power. Unfortunately, we are making history here in California. This year, Carpinteria Valley Water District received 5% of our allocation from the State Water Project, which was 110 acre-feet out of 2200 acre-feet, but next year it is likely that we will receive 0% of our allocation. Not having access to our backup supply to sustain us through drought periods further emphasizes the need for the Carpinteria Advanced Purification Project (CAPP) to ensure that we can meet water demand for the Carpinteria Valley with a locally managed, drought-proof water supply.

Although Lake Cachuma is above 50% capacity, which is great when compared to the historic low of 7.3% capacity in late 2016, water supplies from Lake Cachuma present a number of challenges. Water allocations are likely to be cut this year due to drought and may continue to be cut in future years due to environmental competition, such as endangered Steelhead trout, in the Santa Ynez River. Because the lake is in a similar condition as it was in 2013, we are carefully monitoring reservoir levels and preparing for the possibility that we may need to begin installing the emergency pumping facility as early as next Spring if we do not receive adequate rainfall this winter.

The next few years we will have to balance available water supplies while incorporating conservation measures to ensure we can meet water demand. We are asking for our customers and

private pumpers to cut back on their consumption by up to 20 % to help stretch our water supplies and prevent a strain on the groundwater basin. The District continues to offer rebates to residential and commercial customers for water conservation fixtures and appliances as well as rebates on WaterWise Landscape upgrades. For District updates, please visit our website [cvwd.net](http://cvwd.net), follow us on Twitter @CarpWater, or Carpinteria Valley Water District on Facebook and Nextdoor. For more information on CAPP visit [cvwd.net/capp/](http://cvwd.net/capp/) and to stay up to date on the Carpinteria Groundwater Sustainability Agency and Groundwater Sustainability Plan development visit [carpgsa.org](http://carpgsa.org).