

Environmental Platform for Friends of SLV Water

Water quality is a high priority for many ratepayers in the San Lorenzo Valley Water District. As a result, the District has listed it as a primary element in the proposed Mission Statement. The following list includes elements necessary for providing high quality water to the people of the San Lorenzo Valley.

1. A HEALTHY WATERSHED is a natural asset.

- The living and non-living elements of the watershed create a cyclical system in which water ebbs and flows.
- The Water District uses its *built* assets, like water tanks and treatment plants, to provide water to homes and businesses and it uses *natural* assets, like healthy forests and riparian zones, to insure safe, clean, quality water.ⁱ
- In a normal year, the Water District gets half its water from the ground and half from surface sources, the surface supplies allowing groundwater to rest.ⁱⁱ But shifting rainfalls cause overdraft during times of drought, and Fall Creek's flows drops out of compliance most years in late fall.ⁱⁱⁱ
- If managed well, a healthy watershed can act like a great big sponge that absorbs and cleans water at a low cost. It's just more efficient and less expensive to maintain a healthy watershed.

2. WATER DISTRICT PROPERTIES maintain a green infrastructure.

- When the Water District owns a healthy forest, riparian zone, or sandhills habitat near a well or intake, these properties act the same as expensive, engineered systems but in a natural and sustainable way. This *green infrastructure* provides runoff, percolation into the ground water, and filters some contaminants so that costly built systems won't have to.^{iv}
- As the climate continues to change, these properties can handle future droughts and floods more efficiently than built assets offering the Water District more security and flexibility in addressing these problems.^v
- Some of the District's properties protect only a portion of the watershed's surface. In order to protect all of the surface and ground water near creeks, wells, and intakes, the District needs to identify these properties and either purchase them or develop cooperative agreements/easements with their owners.^{vi}
- District properties need monitoring, maintenance and, in some cases, restoration to provide the fullest benefit.

3. RESTORING HABITAT maintains watershed health.

- In nature, diversity usually results in healthier ecosystems and, by extension, people. With a full suite of native plants and animals inhabiting local habitats, the watershed's beneficial qualities as green infrastructure become more sustainable and needs less maintenance.^{vii}
- When invasive species invade an area they out compete the native species, and in the case of French broom in the Olympia Well Field, they produce monoculture groves of

fire-prone plants, increase regeneration costs, and reduce sight safety distance along access roads.^{viii}

- Commitment to maintaining Water District properties in a natural, high-quality state is key to maintaining watershed health.

4. NETWORKING with other agencies benefits everyone.

- When the Water District teams up with other agencies in our region, the workload and cost is shared.
- The Water District can learn about the benefits that other agencies and organizations can provide, like expert staff or other resources that would not otherwise be available, while other agencies learn about the District's water supplies, infrastructure, assets, services, access, and level of cooperation.^{ix} This allows a level of collaboration that can benefit everyone.
- By assuming a leadership role, the SLV Water District can steer regional water issues to benefit SLV.
- In the past, grant-funding efforts came from collaborations with Santa Margarita Groundwater Agency, Fire Safe Council, Integrated Regional Water Management, and San Lorenzo River 2025. In addition, other organizations like the Felton Library & Felton Discovery Park Program, Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network, Water Conservation Coalition, Weed Management Area Santa Cruz County, State of the San Lorenzo River Symposium and Connecting the Drops have collaborated with the District in stewardship and outreach programs.^x
- Maintaining cooperative relationships with other agencies and organizations today may provide future benefit to the Water District in ways that cannot be predicted.

5. EMERGENCY PREPARATIONS must be planned well in advance.

- As the climate continues to change, emergencies like wildfires, landslides, floods and earthquakes could negatively impact the ability of the Water District to provide safe, clean, quality water.
- To prepare for these emergencies, tanks, pumps, structures, and above ground pipes should be fitted to resist damage and provide the water needed for fire fighting.^{xi}
- The Water District must proactively plan and address emergency access to facilities during and after emergencies to allow for a quick recovery.

6. INFRASTRUCTURE REPAIRS leads to a reduced amount of water extracted from the aquifer.

- The Water District's list of deferred maintenance includes leaking pipelines and tanks and insufficient storage during a severe drought, as well as problems with compliance and aquifer overdraft.^{xii} In 2018, over 67 million gallons of water leaked out of the Water District's infrastructure, water that could have been left in the aquifer.^{xiii}
- As the District repairs leaks, less water pumped from the aquifer will benefit ground water recharge and greater watershed health.

7. WATER CONSERVATION AND EDUCATION insures there's enough during a drought.

- Many people move to SLV to take advantage of its affordable housing. Many of these new comers have a limited understanding that their tap water comes from rainfall

exclusively and that state mandated programs could have an effect on future water rates if they fail to conserve water.

- Ongoing conservation education by the District helps inform ratepayers of District water sources and how much they need to conserve. In the past, the District funded a rebate program, water conservation outreach, and a water conservation coalition of conservation activities.^{xiv}
- When everyone works toward the same conservation goals, then there is enough water for both human and watershed needs.

8. PUBLIC OUTREACH AND EDUCATION keeps ratepayers informed.

- In order to keep ratepayers informed, the Water District needs to maintain open communication with them. Current efforts include: the website, social media, press releases, articles, brochures, handouts, posters, and highway signs.^{xv}
- Lacking outreach, ratepayers make uninformed assumptions and voting decisions based on hearsay.
- Good communication leads to District customers with informed understanding.

9. A professional ENVIRONMENTAL DEPARTMENT organizes and streamlines projects.

- In the past, the Environmental Department helped plan long-range water supply, regulatory compliance, water conservation, sustainable groundwater management, and conjunctive use. They also helped permit capital improvement projects, manage land and stewardship projects, and planned for disaster response. They provided expert answers to environmental questions raised by the Board of Directors and the public, stewarded financial resources through grant programs, and networked with other agencies to share resources and maximize regional impact.^{xvi}
- With the department scaled back to only working on capital-improvement projects, much of the above workload will need expensive contractors to complete.
- Reinstating the Environmental Department with professional staff will help the District move forward toward informed, environmentally sound principles.

10. WATER RATE AFFORDABILITY does not have to come at the cost of a healthy watershed.

- The current Board of Directors has prioritized affordable rates over environmental progress.
- Most ratepayers could afford the current rates and many place the environment much higher in priority than the Water District.
- The few that cannot afford the rates and that are chronically under threat of having their water turned off would benefit from an assistance program.^{xvii}
- Possible programs include Low Income Assistance Rate Programs (LIRA), partnering with local organizations like Valley Churches United or Mountain Community Resource, or establishing tiered rates.^{xviii}
- Safe, clean, quality water is necessary for life, and the expense in maintaining it is money well spent.

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- ⁱ Michelsen, Jennifer, "2019 Water Supply Outlook and Environmental Department Workshop Presentation," slide #62, *San Lorenzo Valley Water District*, http://slvwd.com/_Workshop.htm
- ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, slide #6
- ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, slide #7
- ^{iv} "What is Green Infrastructure?" *American Rivers*, American Rivers Inc., <https://www.americanrivers.org/threats-solutions/clean-water/green-infrastructure/what-is-green-infrastructure/>
- ^v *Ibid*
- ^{vi} Ford, Larry, "Re: Environmental Priorities Draft," message to Lee Summers, 1/20/20, Email
- ^{vii} The Cadmus Group, Inc. for the US Environmental Protection Agency, "California Integrated Assessment for Watershed Health, A Report on the Status and Vulnerability of Watershed Health in California," page 3, *Environmental Protection Agency*, November 2013, https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-11/documents/ca_hw_report_111213_0.pdf
- ^{viii} "International Broom Initiative: A Comprehensive Broom and Gorse Biological Control Effort," *CalEPPC News*, Volume 9, Issue 2, Spring 2001, <https://www.cal-ipc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/newsletters875-6.pdf#page=3>
- ^{ix} Ford, Larry, "Re: Environmental Priorities Draft," message to Lee Summers, 1/20/20, Email
- ^x Michelsen, Jennifer, "2019 Water Supply Outlook and Environmental Department Workshop Presentation," slide #76-77, *San Lorenzo Valley Water District*, http://slvwd.com/_Workshop.htm
- ^{xi} Ford, Larry, "Re: Environmental Elements of Strategic Plans," message to Lee Summers, 1/9/20, Email
- ^{xii} Michelsen, Jennifer, "2019 Water Supply Outlook and Environmental Department Workshop Presentation," slide #83, *San Lorenzo Valley Water District*, http://slvwd.com/_Workshop.htm
- ^{xiii} *Ibid*, slide #19
- ^{xiv} *Ibid*, slide #30
- ^{xv} *Ibid*, slide #73
- ^{xvi} *Ibid*, slide #2
- ^{xvii} Friends of SLV Water, "Providing Safe, Affordable Water to Low Income Households: Options for the San Lorenzo Valley Water District (SLVWD) Draft, 1/27/20
- ^{xviii} *Ibid*