



PROMOTING RELIABLE ACCESS TO SAFE AND AFFORDABLE WATER
FOR ALL SAN LORENZO VALLEY RESIDENTS

To Merge Or Not To Merge

The Consolidation of SLV and Scotts Valley Water Districts

Last February, many SLV residents were alarmed to discover that the Boards of the Scotts Valley Water District (SVWD) and the San Lorenzo Valley Water District (SLVWD) were considering a consolidation. This topic rapidly generated a great deal of confused and misinformed social media commentary. As a result, the Friends of San Lorenzo Valley Water (FSLVW) developed several [documents](#) to address this confusion, and now offer the following overview.

Arguments for: Consolidation is a standard business tool providing numerous potential benefits. In general, larger districts are able to provide water more economically and efficiently than smaller ones, in part because state laws and policies favor greater sizes. Therefore, consolidation provides opportunities to improve performance and reduce costs, thereby saving ratepayers money. Both Water Districts

have broad similarities and complementary strengths. They both struggle to deal with aging infrastructure, intensifying regulatory constraints, and climate change. They have collaborated successfully over the last several years, which would put them in a favorable position to negotiate with Santa Cruz City and County in the Santa Margarita Groundwater Agency process. And lastly, SLVWD is significantly larger than SVWD, so Scotts Valley would not dominate the proposed new district.

Arguments against: The proposed consolidation is at odds with the SLVWD's responsibility to serve its constituents. The two valley communities are different enough that the role and mission of SLVWD would eventually be diluted. Protection of the SLV watershed, a critical priority, will inevitably be put at risk. Over time, as Scotts Valley continued to grow, it would dominate a consolidated district to the detriment of SLV. Right now, there are too many other high priority issues that need addressing (like fallout from last year's fires, the loss of infrastructure, the pandemic and

potential evacuations from debris flows). The proposed consolidation will divert too much time, energy and resources. SLVWD Directors have a responsibility to listen to and respect the will of their constituents who are overwhelmingly opposed to consolidation. If the Districts move forward, this issue could lead to more polarization during the next 2022 election cycle.

SLVWD should delay further assessment of consolidation until more pressing concerns have been resolved.

FSLVW's recommendations: SLVWD should delay further assessment of consolidation until more pressing concerns have been resolved. Any future assessment should include a robust community education and outreach campaign to raise awareness and engage the community in extended discourse.

FSLVW

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Check out our website:
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Officials Urge Big Basin and SLV Water District Merger

By Jayme Ackemann
Originally published in
[The San Lorenzo Valley Post](#)

As early as this summer, Big Basin Water Company customers could see water shortages or other impacts based on an alarming new [order](#) just issued by California's State Water Resources Control Board.

Since the CZU Lightning Complex Fire, Big Basin has operated its system from a single well. Much of the company's water treatment and storage infrastructure was damaged in the fires. But according to the details of an order sent to Big Basin owner Jim Moore, the Moore's water operation has been out of compliance since at least 2018.

The primary issues raised by the Water Board address the Company's ability to treat and store enough water to supply its customer base when demand is heaviest; the company's failure to develop an emergency shutoff plan to ensure customers have access to water during power outages; and its ability to restore its system following the damage caused by last summer's wildfires.

Stefan Catalina, the Chief of the North Coast Section of the Drinking Water Division for the State Water Resources Control Board, sent a letter containing the "Order of Non-Compliance" to Jim Moore on April 9. In it he said, "Big Basin WC has a documented history of failing to administer preventative maintenance, emergency preparedness, and customer complaint programs. This lack of preparation and inadequate customer communication has contributed to Big Basin WC failing to reliably supply its customers with potable water during emergency shutoff events."

The order sets out a series of monthly deadlines the company must meet between May 10 and September 10,

2021. Failure to meet a monthly deadline could result in fines and penalties to the system in addition to the capital needed to address the deficiencies raised by the report.

State and local legislators sent a [letter](#) echoing the concerns raised by the Water Board and encouraging the Water Company's owners to resume discussions with San Lorenzo Valley Water District about annexing their system into the District's operation.

The letter signed by Santa Cruz County Supervisor Bruce McPherson, Assemblymember Mark Stone, and State Senator John Laird, raised several concerns.

"Even before the CZU Lightning Fire, we understood BBWD to be in a state of disrepair..." the letter goes on to echo the deficiencies laid out by the State before raising a troubling new concern for CZU fire victims hoping to rebuild.

"Additionally, as property owners whose homes were destroyed by the fire prepare to rebuild their homes, we are concerned BBWD will not be equipped to provide reliable, safe water – therefore risking the ability of homeowners to gain the needed approvals to rebuild."

Supervisor McPherson urged Big Basin customers to get engaged, "We are especially concerned about customers who are looking to rebuild after the CZU fire, and we wouldn't want their permits held up because of water supply uncertainty. Those customers who support exploring annexation can certainly contact Big Basin Water and SLV Water directly to share their thoughts." He also encouraged customers to reach out to his office with comments and concerns.

The Moores are repeatedly chastised for a lack of customer communication in the State's Order of Non-Compliance. That lack of transparency makes it difficult to know how much capital the

owners may be able to access to begin responding to the deficiencies outlined in the document.

But the peak season for water demand – the summer – is nearly upon us and like the rest of California, the Valley has experienced a very dry winter. That combined with the potential for another active fire season means the demand for water is likely to outstrip Big Basin's ability to supply its customers.

Meanwhile the Moores have reportedly been seeking a buyer for the system for some time. The letter sent jointly by McPherson, Laird, and Stone, referenced the negotiations saying that while the owners implied an offer was imminent more than six months ago, no offer appears to have materialized.

Without a potential buyer, Big Basin WC must place the interests of its customers first. If the small family operator isn't able to finance the work needed to restore the system to compliance it must begin discussions with the San Lorenzo Valley Water District about annexation.

It's not clear what this would mean for the Water District's existing service-annexation would require a vote of Big Basin's customer base – but the Big Basin Water Company is within San Lorenzo Valley Water District's "sphere of influence," according to San Lorenzo Valley General Manager Rick Rogers.

Rogers says he's been in communication with the Big Basin WC's owners to discuss an emergency tie-in should the water company's single well be unable to meet the summer demand or in the event of another emergency.

"It could take a year to 18 months to formally bring Big Basin into our system if we began working towards annexation today," Rogers added. "But there are a few steps Big Basin customers would need to take to do that and there are things our Board would need to consider as well."

City of Santa Cruz Seeks to Modify Water Rights

San Lorenzo River Water Flows Could Change

The Santa Cruz City Water Department (SCWD) has submitted five separate petitions to the California State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) seeking changes to its permits and water rights associated with the San Lorenzo River. SCWD has exclusive rights to the river's water; however, San Lorenzo Valley Water District (SLVWD) has a complementary set of water rights for tributaries that flow into the river. So changing Santa Cruz's water rights necessarily impacts the San Lorenzo Valley.

What SCWD is requesting: SCWD is currently allowed to divert up to 3,000 acre feet of water per year from the river at the Felton Diversion Facility, all of which must be stored at Loch Lomond Reservoir. Although the total amount of diverted water would not change, SCWD's petitions would modify where and when diversion is allowed and where and how it can be used. The two major proposed changes that SLVWD has protested include: 1) increase the required river flows below Felton, which would prohibit any diversion during the summer months and would increase the

river flows to as high as 40 cubic feet per second for the period December through May, and 2) prohibit delivery of river water to any other water supplier during drought conditions.

The SLVWD protest: Increased flow requirements at Felton will compromise SLVWD's plan to change its water rights for Fall Creek, which SLVWD overdrafts during the fall months. The District plans to modify its own water rights and therefore requested that the State wait to consider both petitions at once. In addition, SLVWD has a contractual right to use some of the Loch Lomond Reservoir water, so they request assurance that they would not lose this contractual right.

Potential next steps: If the petitions pass, SCWD will file an EIR, providing interested parties a chance to voice their opinion. Collaborative efforts by SLVWD, SVWD, Mt. Hermon Water District, local environmental groups and/or other interested parties working together would have a multiplying effect. The Santa Margarita Groundwater Agency deliberations also provide a forum to address the petition's impacts on regional planning. See [FSLVW](#) for more.



FSLVW Leadership

Mark Dolson (Secretary)

Cynthia Dzendzel

Larry Ford

Peter Gelblum

Nancy Macy

Jim Mosher (Facilitator, Treasurer)

Linda Skeff

Lee Summers

Virginia Wright

April Zilber

In Other Water Related News

Director Tina To resigned from the SLVWD Board of Directors three months after swearing in. The strenuous time commitment needed as a Director conflicted with her law school and family commitments. The District appointed Jayme Ackemann as her replacement at the May 6 Board of Directors meeting. Congratulations, Jayme.

Much thanks to Christina Wise for her feedback on FSLVW's transparency. Her questions pointed out a need for us to develop stronger communication links with finer resolution. This inaugural newsletter is one way we are addressing her feedback. [FSLVW](#) is an all-volunteer group of SLV citizens with a deep concern for our local community and for continued reliable access to safe and affordable water. We share a commitment to collaborative, practical, science-based decision-making and seek to play a positive role in our community by promoting broader awareness and understanding of water-related issues. We [welcome](#) any local, water-related questions and concerns.

FSLVW provides summary accounts for all SLVWD Board meetings. The official minutes for each meeting are prepared by the District Secretary and published in advance of the next meeting as part of the official Board Packet. However, as a service to the SLV community, FSLVW also offers [summary accounts](#).