



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

Big Basin Water Co. Seeks Consolidation

Big Basin Water Company officially requested possible consolidation with SLV Water District

By Mark Dolson and Lee Summers

More than 40 members of the public attended the November 4 meeting of the SLV Water District (SLVWD). At the meeting, District Manager, Rick Rogers, reported that the owners of the Big Basin Water Company (BBWC) had requested in writing that the District explore purchasing the Company.

The BBWC's letter was the essential first step for moving beyond the emergency assistance that the SLVWD has provided on a limited basis, such as supplying a repair crew on October 21 after a mainline break caused a system outage.

BBWC's infrastructure was seriously damaged by the CZU Fire in August 2020, adding to the problems associated with years of deferred

maintenance and underfunding. It became increasingly difficult for the district to provide safe water, attracting increasingly negative attention in recent months from both dissatisfied customers and concerned state officials.

According to Patrick LaBruzzo, BBWC customer and community organizer, since BBWC is a privately owned company, annexation into a public district is not an option. It must be purchased outright. The only other option would be receivership, where a court would appoint an entity to receive and operate the company. Jim Moore, BBWC's owner, approached SLVWD to begin negotiations for a purchase when the State Water Board announced its intention to pursue receivership.

On November 4, the SLVWD Board considered a motion to begin negotiations with Moore for a purchase as well as an emergency operating agreement, which the BBWC would agree to fund. The BBWC also agreed to include SLVWD in any negotiations for the sale of company assets.

An official purchase would require that the District complete the formal Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) review process, which would likely take around 18 months.

During the meeting, both BBWC and SLVWD customers, as well as County Supervisor, Bruce McPherson, expressed strong agreement to explore a potential consolidation.

Questions about the cost arose for BBWC customers, but Rogers said that this would depend on engineering studies and funding opportunities. State funding is likely to appear, but the active support and involvement of current BBWC customers would be a key factor in a successful consolidation.

The Board voted unanimously for the motion and to move forward with further purchase negotiations between BBWC and SLVWD.

For more, go to the SLVWD 11/4/21 meeting notes on the [FSLVW website](#) (scroll down to the correct date).

FSLVW

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Debris Flow Update

New debris flow maps offer finer resolution for homes in danger

By Jim Mosher

After the evacuations of the CZU fire in August 2020, representatives from Friends of SLV Water (FSLVW) met the following December with County officials to provide community input into the debris flow evacuation planning process. FSLVW submitted a memorandum on December 21, 2020, that included seven recommendations that emerged from the meeting such as more detailed mapping and better communication with residents.

FSLVW commends the County for making substantial improvements in debris flow evacuation planning and implementation. The new, detailed [Atkins Debris Flow Maps](#) provide sufficient information for residents to determine the risks associated with intense rainfall at their property. Prior to the October 25, 2021 storm, the Sheriff's office made door-to-door visits to residents at risk for debris-flow hazards to insure they received evacuation notification.

FSLVW commends the County for making improvements in evacuation planning and implementation. However, at least three issues still remain.

However, there are at least three issues that arose during the recent storm causing considerable confusion and

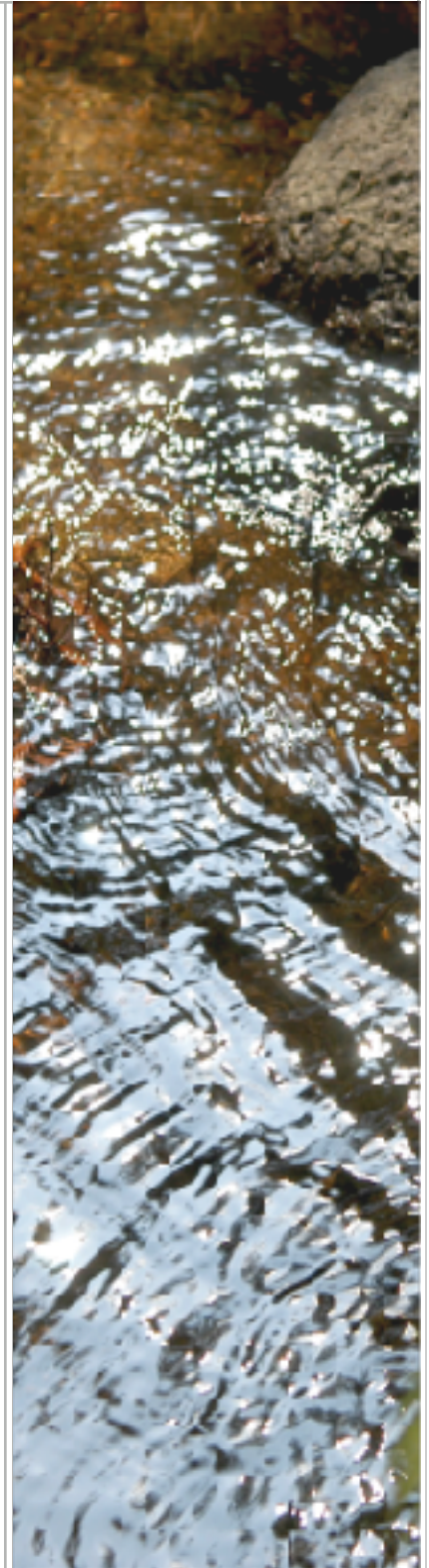
consternation among SLV residents. The following issues still need addressing:

1. Coordinate the Code Red automated evacuation order system with the Zonehaven evacuation zones. Numerous residents became confused when they received automated calls and texts ordering them to evacuate even though their homes were not in danger and were not in an evacuation zone as delineated in the Zonehaven maps.

2. Use the data in the Atkins maps to distinguish between evacuation orders due to life-threatening debris flow risk versus potential road closures or minor flooding. The County should alert residents if their properties are at risk for road blockages and/or minor flooding without ordering evacuations. Mandated evacuations should be reserved for those residing of properties that face life-threatening, debris-flow risk. Otherwise "evacuation fatigue" may grow.

3. Improve debris flow evacuation information and emergency communication. The 2020 Sheriff's brochure needed revisions, but was a useful tool, particularly when Internet connections failed. Additional information on evacuation resources is needed both prior to and during evacuation orders, yet the means for communicating with residents, like Internet and cell phone service, frequently broke down during heavy storms. The County should also look at the feasibility of working collaboratively with Internet and cell phone service providers to maintain these vital communication services during major storms and power outages.

For more information, go to the FSLVW [website](#).



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SLV Water District Fire Management

Carlie Blanchard, SLVWD Environmental Program Manager, updated FSLVW on fire management

By Larry Ford

The 2021 fire season ended with relief as the rainstorms of late October dropped about 14 inches in three weeks, reaching two-thirds of the 21.5 inches of last year's rainfall and one-quarter of the annual average. SLV experienced no major fire, providing a respite from the fear and risks of more fire damage.

The Water District's recent accomplishments in fire management:

In 2009, the Water District completed the Fire Management chapter of the SLV Watershed Management Plan, a comprehensive resource assessment. That chapter contained detailed and thorough information about fire history, expected fire effects, related government and consultant studies along with plans completed by that time, and other context for fire management options in the SLV. Still to be accomplished is a detailed professional plan for managing current Water District infrastructure and fire risks in our region which continues to face threats of major wildfires.

The Water District hired a fire management consultant team, led by Panorama Environmental, in March 2020. The consulting team began planning with the Water District, and when the CZU Fire swept into the valley in August, the consultants provided critical expertise and assistance with satellite images of fire progress and vulnerabilities within the Water District.

The consultants continued planning after the CZU Fire, and by May 2021, they completed the "San Lorenzo Valley Water District, Post-Fire Recovery, Critical Asset Hardening, Vegetation, and Fuels Management

Plan," which the Board approved. By then the consultants and Water District staff had begun the laborious process of applying for environmental permits as well as seeking additional grants to implement the plan. California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) permitting was completed in September 2021, covering all the Water District's planned fire management activities.

In June 2021, the Water District received a \$200,000 fuel reduction grant from the California Coastal Conservancy. The grant provides the resources for the CEQA permitting, the registered professional forester, and vegetation management consultants needed to complete fuel reduction at four well sites, two tanks, and one booster site. Work kicked off in November with completion scheduled for early December 2021.

In August 2021, the District received a \$480,000 Forest Health grant through the Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County and California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection's (CALFIRE) Forest Health Grant program. This will support additional fuel reduction, plantings, and removal of hazardous eucalyptus trees and other invasive pest plants on Water District lands. A major challenge in pandemic times has been high costs for contractors, especially for removal of the woody fuels.

The Water District has received the first of several expected Forest Improvement grants from CALFIRE and hired Panorama Environmental to prepare a Forest Management Plan for its lands, due in December 2021. Subsequent grants from CALFIRE as well as carbon pollution mitigation funds will support additional fuel reduction, planting, and invasive pest plant removal.

A more detailed article on this topic will be posted on the FSLVW website soon.

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Implementing Tiered Rates for the SLV Water District

By Jim Mosher

The Friends of SLV Water (FSLVW) has proposed that the SLV Water District (SLVWD) consider tiered water rates for the upcoming fiscal year. The district currently has a basic service charge of \$35.34 for residential customers and a fixed charge for water use of \$12.66/per 748 gallons. With tiered rates, charges per gallon increase as usage increases to higher tiers, so that heavy users pay more per gallon than light users.

Why Tiered Rates? Drought conditions and the challenges we face from climate change make water conservation a critical priority for SLVWD and the entire central coast region. Research has shown that a tiered rate structure is an effective tool for promoting conservation by providing a financial incentive to reduce consumption. A 2015 study found tiered pricing reduced water demand by 10 to 15 percent compared to a uniform rate structure with the same average price level.

Tiered rates also promote FSLVW's commitment to treating water as a fundamental human right by shifting more of the costs to heavier users. SLVWD's Rate Assistance Program (RAP) can cover a higher percentage of a low-income customer's bill with tiered rates since the cost of the first tier of water usage can be significantly lower. This is why FSLVW supports both implementing tiered rates and expanding the SLVWD RAP program.

Why did SLVWD drop its tiered rates? SLVWD, as well as most other water districts in California, had tiered rates until 2015. That year, a California Court of

Appeals issued a decision that the tiered rates violated Proposition 218 because the differential rates were not linked to the actual cost of providing the specific units of water to customers. SLVWD and most other California water districts discontinued their tiered rates following this court decision for fear of litigation.

Strategies for meeting the Proposition 218 requirements: The Appellate Court's opinion provided the rationale for reinstating tiered rates: heavier users can be charged more if it can be shown that their use increases specific costs to the district not attributable to usage at lower tiers. For example, most water districts, including SLVWD, have multiple sources of water, with some sources more expensive than others. Heavier and inefficient users create the need to produce or purchase high-cost water and should therefore pay at the higher rate, with the costs going up with use (i.e., tiered rates).

Water districts across the state are now adopting tiered rates by documenting the increased costs caused by heavy users, including the water districts of Santa Cruz, Scotts Valley, and San Mateo, as well as East Bay Municipal Water District.

Next Steps for SLVWD: Our district will be hiring a rate study consultant in early 2022 to assess various options for addressing the district's anticipated costs over the next five years. These studies involve complex methodologies analyzing multiple data sets and assessing various rate and cost options. FSLVW encourages the Board to include the feasibility of tiered rates in the study.

Go to the [FSLVW website](#) for more.



FSLVW Leadership Team

Mark Dolson (Secretary)

Cynthia Dzendzel

Larry Ford

Peter Gelblum

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Jim Mosher (Facilitator, Treasurer)

Linda Skeff

Lee Summers

April Zilber

Groundwater Sustainability Plan Passed

The Santa Margarita Groundwater Agency (SMGWA) passed the Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) at a public outreach meeting on November 17, 2021. Its next steps are to submit the plan in January 2022 to the State Department of Water Resources for review and approval. According to SMGWA emailings, "Informed by the public comments, the final GSP will guide long-term management of the groundwater basin to ensure a reliable and resilient water supply for community needs and the environment." It went on to explain that the plan also provides SMGWA's ongoing management of the Basin to not only achieve sustainability in a 20-year planning horizon but to maintain sustainability over a 50-year implementation horizon. Go to www.smgwa.org for more information.