

SLVWD Board Meeting Summary

Special Meetings: August 19th thru September 9th, 2020

Mark Dolson

The CZU Lightning Complex fire forced the evacuation of the entire San Lorenzo Valley beginning on Tuesday evening August 18th. The water District operated in emergency-response mode throughout the ensuing three weeks.

August 19, 2020

CZU Wildfire State of Emergency

District Manager Rick Rogers reported that CAL FIRE is making all tactical fire-fighting decisions. CAL FIRE has determined that its very limited resources are best focused on protecting downtown Boulder Creek. To this end, they are directing the District to turn off water to outlying areas. The Board voted 4-0 (Director Farris was not present) to authorize the District Manager to work in cooperation with CAL FIRE under its emergency authority. All of the District's infrastructure remains intact, and the District feels as prepared as it can be at this point for whatever is to come.

August 21, 2020

Declaration of Emergency Situation

District Counsel Gina Nicholls outlined the legal requirements for conducting emergency meetings. The Board approved the appropriate motion 5-0. Director Fultz urged that meeting recordings be publicly posted as soon as possible.

CZU Wildfire Update

District Manager Rick Rogers reported that early in the morning of August 21st, the fire reached the District's Lyon Water Treatment Plant, the Big Steel Booster, and Lyon, Little Lyon, and Big Steel Tanks, causing major damage and also the loss of about 4 million gallons of water. The bulk of the District's water is currently coming from wells, and hydrants on the main corridors are continuing to provide adequate water to fire trucks.

Rick further explained that many people have left sprinklers running on their roofs and that the District is needing to manually shut these off to preserve scarce water resources.

Contracts for Emergency Services and/or Repairs

District Manager Rick Rogers requested authorization to enter into emergency repair and construction contracts for temporary repairs to restore storage capability. He recommended that permanent repair employ a more fire-resistant piping solution, but this will likely be a 2-3-year process. In contrast, repairs can begin within a week.

The Board found that an emergency exists, and it authorized the District Manager to enter into up to \$250,000 of emergency contracts. [The approved amount was subsequently reported as \$200,000.]

Water Shortage Emergency

The Board engaged in an extended discussion about the unanticipated and extensive loss and waste of water due to home sprinkler use and the appropriate legal and public relations response. The requested resolution was confusing for everyone as the District was already in a Stage 2 emergency shortage which forbids this kind of watering. Rick Rogers reported that staff are turning off the water at unoccupied homes but have encountered very emotional homeowners on some occasions. Conversely, Stephanie Hill reported that other customers are calling to apologize and request that their water be turned off. The Board eventually voted 5-0 in favor of a resolution confirming the water emergency.

August 24, 2020

No public record of this meeting has yet been made available.

CZU Wildfire Update

District Manager Rick Rogers provided a status update. This report was superseded by subsequent reports.

Water Shortage Emergency

District Counsel Gina Nicholls reported the results of her investigation into the District's legal authority to shut off water as dictated by fire-fighting priorities.

August 28, 2020

CZU Wildfire Update

Rick Rogers delivered a very detailed status report. His overarching message was that the District is in good shape except for a few outlying areas. However, he also made it clear that substantial damage has occurred and there is potential for extended disruption in service north of the intersection of Alba Road and Highway 9.

Three major areas of impact were reviewed: (1) damage to infrastructure, (2) potential water contamination, and (3) damage to the watershed. A detailed account of the damaged infrastructure is included in the Board Meeting Packet with Backup. The potential contamination is being addressed under the supervision of the State Water Resources Board. Extensive sampling will be performed, and A “Do Not Drink / Do Not Boil” notice will be issued for homes north of the intersection of Alba Road with Highway 9.

Rick further stated that about 300 service connections are out of water, and he believes that water will be restored to most of these areas before Labor Day. He said that the District is now fully in recovery mode. They have increased the water supply back into those areas that CAL FIRE previously asked the District to isolate.

Office staff have already begun working closely with affected customers, and the District expects to offer further accommodations as needed. For example, they will ignore abnormally high water consumption in August, and they also have a catastrophic event policy. In addition, Boulder Creek Fire is reaching out to local businesses to understand their special needs.

Update on Contracts

The Board voted 5-0 to supplement the initial \$200,000 emergency spending authorization with an additional \$350,000 for temporary remedial procurements. The District will move forward with bridge loans after they understand their FEMA allocation and other details. District staff are working seven days per week, and three temporary employees have been added for the next month.

September 9, 2020

CZU Wildfire Update

District Manager Rick Rogers provided an update on fire damage and recovery. The target date for restoring the 300 lost connections is now 9/12. About 510 connections are still subject to the “Do Not Drink / Do Not Boil” notice. However, VOCs (specifically, benzene) have only been detected in one neighborhood (Riverside Grove). The testing lab is turning around results in 24 hours, but the state review process still takes multiple days. Many repairs are underway, and a preliminary FEMA assessment has estimated the damage at around \$11 million.

FEMA Process

The standard cost-sharing basis is 75% FEMA and 25% state and local. Discussions with FEMA are underway, but funding amounts have not yet been specified. Detailed discussions will be needed to determine where FEMA may draw a line between “repair” and “improvement.”