



UPPER LOS ANGELES RIVER AREA WATERMASTER
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**UPDATED REPORT OF ULARA WATERMASTER
STATUS CONFERENCE of DECEMBER 1, 2017
SUPERIOR COURT, DEPARTMENT 52
HONORABLE SUSAN BRYANT-DEASON**

A. Ongoing Watermaster Activities

1. The past due Annual Watermaster Report for Water Year (WY) 2014-15 has been submitted to the Court and published on the ULARA Website; the report is dated December 2016. The Watermaster recently received the modeling analyses from one of the Parties for the Annual Report for WY 2015-16, and is in the process of completing this latest report. A Draft of this Annual Report should be available for review by the Parties in early December 2017.
2. Preparation of the Annual Groundwater Pumping and Spreading Plan for the ULARA Parties for the 5-year period of Water Years 2014-15 through 2018-19 was submitted to the Court and published on the ULARA website; this report is dated December 2015. A Draft of the Annual Groundwater Pumping and Spreading Plan for WYs 2015-16 through 2019-20 was sent to the Parties for review on October 18, 2017, and the Watermaster is currently awaiting all Parties to complete their independent review. This report is expected to be finalized and sent to the Court in December 2017.
3. The Watermaster continues to submit information to the State Department of Water Resources (DWR) Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) website to make sure ULARA is in compliance with SGMA. Such data uploads occur on an annual basis.
4. The Watermaster continues to maintain compliance with DWR on its California Statewide Groundwater Elevation Monitoring program (known as CASGEM) for the four groundwater basins within ULARA. The most recent data upload to the CASGEM website for ULARA occurred in late-April 2017. Data for the fall measurements have been requested by the Watermaster, and will be uploaded to the CASGEM system in the coming weeks.
5. The Watermaster provided a Draft (dated March 31, 2016) of a report to the Parties on the issue of Hill and Mountain pumping in the watershed regions of ULARA. The Watermaster received a response by one Party (LADWP), dated June 22, 2017. The Watermaster is in the process developing a mutually-acceptable resolution with that Party. A revised Draft will be distributed to all Parties when complete.
6. The Watermaster participated with the USEPA on a basin-wide water level monitoring program for the San Fernando Basin. Water level monitoring took place in mid-April, 2017, in all accessible public and private wells and groundwater monitoring wells in this



basin. Once the new water level data are provided by the EPA's contractor to the Watermaster, the Watermaster will prepare an independent groundwater elevation contour map for April 2017 for the San Fernando Basin.

7. The Watermaster has continued to review and either approve or deny, based on site-specific conditions, the Low Impact Development (LID) projects within the City of Los Angeles portions of ULARA (i.e., the San Fernando & Sylmar basins).

B. Salt & Nutrient Management Plan (SNMP)

The Watermaster is nearing completion of work on the SNMP for the four groundwater basins within ULARA. This project basically involves assessing possible changes in concentration trends over time in total dissolved solids, nitrate (as NO₃), and chloride in the ULARA groundwater basins, as a result of the use of recycled water for various projects. Each Party has a 2-member group to serve on the SNMP subcommittee formed by the Watermaster. This subcommittee has been meeting on a monthly basis; these monthly meetings are no longer necessary, and the group will now meet on an "as needed" basis. Key representatives from the Parties routinely attend, and key staff from the Regional Water Quality Control Board – Los Angeles region (RWQCB-LA), are invited to these meetings to maintain liaison and to keep them informed of the progress of the study.

As part of the SNMP process, five Technical Memoranda have been distributed to date for public review. The published Technical Memoranda can be accessed by the public by visiting www.ULARAwatermaster.com/SNMP. A second public meeting was held on July 13, 2017, to present the findings of SNMP to the public, and to give the public another opportunity to comment.

In July 2017, the Watermaster and two of the subconsultants met with key staff at the RWQCB-LA to present the nearly-complete plan. The plan was very well received by RWQCB-LA staff, and the Watermaster was given the go-ahead by the RWQCB-LA to begin work on the environmental documentation for the SNMP.

On October 17, 2017 a CEQA scoping meeting for the SNMP was held. Following a 10-day public comment period that expired on October 27, 2017, comments were received from interested parties and the Watermaster and the ULARA SNMP team are currently working on responses to those comments.

C. The Interim Agreement for the Preservation of the San Fernando Basin Water Supply

The 10-year Interim Agreement resulted from the "White Paper" (dated March 2007, and prepared by the former Watermaster) and discussed the long-term declines in both static (non-pumping) water levels and the volume of groundwater in storage in San Fernando Basin (SFB). According to that former Watermaster, these declines were caused by various factors including: import return credits; over pumping; reduced natural and artificial recharge; groundwater underflow and rising groundwater leaving the basin; and under-accounting of pumping by third parties.

As a result of this "White Paper," the ULARA Parties with rights to pump from the SFB (the Cities of Burbank, Glendale and Los Angeles) entered into a Stipulation in October 2007, in



regard to an “Interim Agreement for the Preservation of the San Fernando Basin Water Supply.” The Agreement had a term of 10 years, and provided that at the conclusion of the term (i.e., on or about September 30, 2017), the Parties, in coordination with the Watermaster, were required to evaluate its effectiveness. The Agreement expired on September 30, 2017.

Among the key provisions of the 10-year Agreement were the following:

1. Reserved Credits. The Parties agreed not to pump their pro-rata share of the Stored Water Credits (below the 1968 groundwater storage volume) in the SFB, and instead agreed to reserve such credits until sufficient groundwater is in storage to allow pumping of those credits without allowing groundwater in storage to fall below that 1968 level.
2. Projects. LADWP and the County of Los Angeles agreed to initiate projects to restore and enhance artificial recharge of stormwater in SFB. Projects to be undertaken included ones at Big Tujunga Dam and a few existing spreading grounds in the northeastern portion of SFB.
3. Basin Losses. Because rising groundwater and groundwater underflow leaves SFB at/near Gage F-57C, the Watermaster was authorized to deduct 1% each year from the total Stored Water Credits accumulated over time by each of the Parties, until the basin-loss deduction was re-evaluated.
4. Conduct Safe Yield Evaluation of SFB. A safe yield study was attempted by a consultant retained by the ULARA Administrative Committee (AC) in 2008, but the effort was not accepted by the AC or the Watermaster, and the draft study was abandoned and never finalized.

Prior to the conclusion of the term of the 10-year Agreement on September 30, 2017, the Watermaster met with the 3 Parties in the SFB (the cities of Burbank, Glendale, and Los Angeles) to discuss the above issues.

Over the past several months, the 3 Parties and their counsel have discussed a possible extension of the Interim Agreement; the Watermaster was not part of those recent discussions amongst those 3 Parties. No agreement was reached by the Parties, and as a result, the 10-year Agreement expired on September 30, 2017.

D. Basic Effectiveness of 10-Year Stipulation - SFB

It is this Watermaster’s opinion that the 10-year Agreement for the SFB was effective in enhancing the potential for increasing the opportunity to recharge the groundwater in this basin. Notably, LADWP, in partnership with the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works (LACDPW), have invested ±\$100M since 2007 to, among other items, increase recharge at Tujunga Spreading Grounds, improve the capacity and seismic stability of Big Tujunga Dam, and improve and increase the spreading capacity at both Hansen Spreading Grounds and the Tujunga Spreading Grounds. Other major scheduled projects to increase groundwater recharge include: improvements to the Pacoima Spreading Grounds, Lopez Spreading Grounds, and the Branford Spreading Basin; and providing sediment removal behind Big Tujunga and Pacoima Dams to increase upstream storage for infiltration downstream at the



spreading grounds. Also, several additional projects involving “green streets” and distributed recharge projects have been completed, and/or are planned. These facilities all lie within or near the most coarse-grained alluvial-type sediments in the northeastern portion of the SFB.

Unfortunately, the quantity of the additional recharge to be afforded by all of the already-completed and soon-to-be-completed projects is unknown, because such recharge is wholly dependent on the variability of the climate, i.e., to changes in the total rainfall each year in the region. There has been only one above average “wet” year in the past 7 or 8 years.

Also important to the Watermaster is that LADWP continues to prepare, and file each year with the Court and the Watermaster, a “Status Report on Projects to Enhance Recharge Capacity in the San Fernando Groundwater Basin.” A copy of the most recent LADWP filing with the Court (dated December 21, 2016) is also provided in the Annual Watermaster Report to the Court.

My opinion, as ULARA Watermaster, as to the effectiveness of other terms that were a part of the now-terminated Stipulation are the following:

1. Reserved Stored Water Credits

For the Stipulation, all 3 Parties had agreed not to pump their pro-rata share of these Reserved Credits until such time as sufficient groundwater was in storage to allow pumping of those credits, without allowing groundwater in storage to fall below the 1968 groundwater storage volume. The credits have not been heavily utilized, due to the fact that LADWP, the holder of the largest amount of these credits, cannot pump enough groundwater at this time to access any of its credits. LADWP, because of the large amount of known groundwater contamination in the eastern portion of the SFB, is currently unable to pump its existing water right, let alone to begin “consuming” these reserved credits.

2. Basin Losses

The Watermaster, in the 10-year Agreement, was authorized to deduct, and for the duration of the Agreement has deducted, 1% each year from the accrued Stored Water Credits that had been accumulating each year by each of the 3 Parties in SFB. This Watermaster has determined that this deduction has no real effect on the health of the basin, as it only deducted the accumulation of credits, and does not affect pumping each year. Hence, this Watermaster previously stated to those Parties that this 1% reduction issue can be eliminated at the conclusion of the 10-year Agreement.

3. Safe Yield Evaluation of SFB

Section 6 of the 10-year Agreement called for a study of the safe yield of the SFB, and required the Parties to develop a proposal for conducting such a study. Specifically, the Agreement required the Parties to “commence a study of the Basin’s safe Yield that is consistent with the proposal required by this Section, as may be agreed upon by the Parties.”

Through a series of discussions in 2008, the Parties retained an outside consultant to conduct a safe yield study of the SFB to satisfy the requirements of the Agreement. The consultant was required to prepare and deliver a Draft report in 2009 to the Project Director (Mr. Mel Blevins), the then-Watermaster (Mr. Mark Mackowski), the Parties,



and the Technical Committee for review and comment. The current Watermaster was a member of the Technical Committee at that time.

In late-October 2009, a Draft report of the safe yield study was provided by the consultant to the Project Director. Based on the review by Mr. Blevins, the then-new Watermaster (Mr. Richard Slade), and the Technical Committee jointly identified significant flaws in that draft study. Following discussions with the Administrative Committee (AC), and at the regularly scheduled Status Conference with the Court in early-2010, the Watermaster informed the Court that the Draft was indeed not satisfactory for determining an updated safe yield value for the SFB. The Draft study was not finalized or adopted by the Parties.

At this time, a new safe yield evaluation of the SFB would not be effective, partly because the effects of the newly-completed and proposed enhanced recharge projects have not been realized, and also because the Watermaster is still verifying/assessing/improving the existing data collection in the region. Further, LADWP's ability to pump its water right from the SFB is currently impaired due to widespread groundwater contamination, as noted above.

4. Also of importance is that the Watermaster continues to evaluate the effectiveness and accuracy of the various gages and monitoring wells in the SFB, in preparation/support for a future safe yield study of the SFB. Among the types of ongoing Watermaster evaluations are the following:
 - a. Working with LACDPW to verify data from runoff Gage F-57C at the downstream toe of ULARA.
 - b. Working with the USEPA to obtain accurate static water level data from the existing water wells and groundwater monitoring wells in the SFB (the most recent basin-wide monitoring event was April 2017).
 - c. Preparing and evaluating available historic and current water level data from numerous wells and groundwater monitoring wells for possible trends, relative to changes in rainfall and recharge.
 - d. Conducting a field visit with two hydrographers from LADWP to three known groundwater monitoring wells in the vicinity of runoff Gage F-57C, at the southern edge of ULARA. The field visit was part of the Watermaster's ongoing efforts to help verify that water level data from those monitoring wells are being accurately monitored, and that those monitoring wells and their locations and depths are appropriate for obtaining data on the local alluvium through which groundwater leaves ULARA. Such accurate data will be important for a possible future safe yield re-evaluation of the San Fernando Basin.

Water levels and total casing depths were correctly monitored by both LADWP and the Watermaster; the Watermaster has requested that LADWP use their downwell video camera to verify the perforation interval(s) in two of these monitoring wells.



- e. Discussing the issue of the occasional anomalously-shallow water levels being monitored and recorded by various Parties in a few of the wells for which hydrographs are presented in each Annual Watermaster Report.

E. ULARA “Policies and Procedures”

The original ULARA Watermaster prepared the first “Policies and Procedures” document in July 1987. Second and Third Updates to the document were subsequently prepared by that Watermaster, and were dated July 1987 and July 1993, respectively.

The basic purposes of the “Policies and Procedures” document are: to provide a summary of the decreed extraction rights of the various parties to the Court-adjudicated ULARA region; to discuss the overall management of groundwater; and to state the basic rules for the activities of the Watermaster and the Administrative Committee.

The Watermaster, in conjunction with the Administrative Committee, is beginning to prepare an update of the existing “Policies and Procedures” document for ULARA, dated July 1993. Numerous and substantial changes are envisioned to bring that document up to date, and to help ensure that it is in conformance with the more current guidelines established by the DWR and other agencies, in regard to programs like CASGEM, SGMA, and SNMP, as well as reflecting the current practices of the Watermaster in relation to report preparation and approval, report distribution, etc.

The Watermaster expects to have several meetings and discussions with the Parties in regard to possible changes, deletions, and additions to the existing document. The Watermaster’s goal is to provide a complete Draft of the Updated “Policies and Procedures” document to the Parties by November, 2018.

F. Other Items

- Issuance of RFP for new Watermaster Counsel
- Recent discussions with LA County indicates this year may be a “la Niña” year in terms of rainfall.