



UPPER LOS ANGELES RIVER AREA WATERMASTER

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**REPORT OF ULARA WATERMASTER  
STATUS CONFERENCE of SEPTEMBER 25, 2020  
SUPERIOR COURT, DEPARTMENT 52  
HONORABLE SUSAN BRYANT-DEASON**

**A. Current Events in ULARA**

1. The Watermaster and/or Assistant Watermaster have been participating in the Technical Advisory Committee for the in-progress Los Angeles River Flows Project being performed by Southern California Coastal Water Research Project (SCCWRP). The purpose of the study is to look at the range of effects of changes in flow in the LA River that are dependent on rainfall and treatment plant discharges with respect to environmental uses in and around the river. From the project website:

*“The State Water Board and the Los Angeles Water Board, in cooperation with local municipalities (including City of LA Bureau of Sanitation, City of LA Department of Water and Power, LA County Department of Public Works, and LA County Sanitation Districts), have initiated the Los Angeles River Flows Project (Project) to better evaluate the cumulative impacts of potential flow reductions. The Project will provide a science-based approach for assessing flow necessary to sustain beneficial uses.”*

[\(https://www.sccwrp.org/about/research-areas/ecohydrology/los-angeles-river-flows-project/](https://www.sccwrp.org/about/research-areas/ecohydrology/los-angeles-river-flows-project/), 2020)

The Watermaster is focusing on issues associated with the ULARA Judgment and the aspects of groundwater modeling associated with the project research. Other ULARA Parties attend the TAC meetings in addition to the Watermaster.

2. The California High-Speed Rail (HSR) proposed project alignment passes through ULARA, including the Burbank area of the San Fernando Basin, the largest of the four ULARA groundwater basins. The Watermaster’s office reviewed the Draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (DEIR) for the California High-Speed Rail (HSR) Burbank to Los Angeles Project Section, and submitted comments during the public review period. Descriptions of the project in the DEIR state that temporary, or possibly permanent, dewatering activities will occur within the alignment of the HSR that lies within the greater Burbank portion of ULARA, as part of the construction of the rail line. Mentions of the ULARA Judgment and the ULARA Watermaster were sparse in the environmental documentation, and the document did not appear to consider the adjudicated nature of ULARA with respect to groundwater extraction and disposal for construction or permanent dewatering. The Watermaster comment letter advised the document preparers that all extractions of groundwater from anywhere within the ULARA boundaries must be reported to the ULARA Watermaster, and requested that the ULARA



Watermaster reporting requirements be incorporated into final versions of the Environmental documentation. That comment letter also noted that the proposed dewatering areas may contain contaminated groundwater.

The comment letter submitted by the Watermaster can be viewed on the ULARA Watermaster website (<http://ularawatermaster.com/news>). Note that some of the ULARA Parties, Lockheed, and the Regional Water Quality Control Board have also submitted comments on the project.

## **B. Status of Annual reports**

1. The Annual Watermaster Report for Water Year (WY) 2017-18 is nearly complete and is expected to be submitted to Court and published on the ULARA Website in October 2020; the document will be dated December 2019. The Watermaster has received the vast majority of necessary data from all reporting Parties in order to prepare the Annual Report for WY 2018-19. A Draft of this WY 2018-19 Annual Report is projected to be available for review by the Parties in December 2020.
2. The 2019-20 water year will come to a close on September 30, 2020; the Watermaster will formally request data in the first week of October 2020 from the Parties and others who will then need to submit their data for WY 2019-20.
3. The Parties are currently reviewing a Draft of the Annual Groundwater Pumping and Spreading Plan for WYs 2017-18 through 2022-23. This report is expected to be finalized and sent to the Court in October 2020.
4. The Annual Groundwater Pumping and Spreading Plan for WYs 2018-19 through 2022-23 is in process.

## **C. Ongoing Watermaster Activities**

1. The Watermaster continues to submit information to the State Department of Water Resources (DWR) SGMA website to help verify that ULARA maintains its compliance with SGMA. Such data uploads occur on an annual basis. Due to COVID closures and delays in data delivery, DWR extended the due date for SGMA reporting for adjudicated basins. Once the annual reports have been filed, the Watermaster will upload the requisite data.
2. 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. Data from the Parties for their Spring 2020 water level measurements were uploaded to the CASGEM system in April 2020. Data for Fall 2020 will be uploaded in October 2020.
3. 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).



#### **D. Salt & Nutrient Management Plan (SNMP)**

The Watermaster is nearing completion of work on the SNMP for the four groundwater basins within ULARA. This project has basically involved an assessment and proposed management of possible changes in concentration trends over time in total dissolved solids, nitrate (as NO<sub>3</sub>), and chloride in the ULARA groundwater basins, as a result of the use of recycled water for various projects. 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](http://www.ULARAwatermaster.com/SNMP).

In July 2017, the Watermaster was given the go-ahead by the RWQCB-LA to begin work on the environmental documentation for the SNMP. Preparation of the necessary CEQA environmental documentation process is ongoing, and the Watermaster has been working with RWQCB-LA and ESA, the CEQA subcontractor, to move the documentation forward. As of March 2020, the Watermaster has received comments from the Parties and is working with ESA to finalize the documents. The Watermaster received from the Parties the requisite water quality data necessary to summarize current water quality conditions in the ULARA basins, with the final data provided in August 2020. Currently the Watermaster is finalizing the documents for final review and submittal, and expects the documents to be completed by mid-October 2020.

#### **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 1993 and February 1998, 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 preparing an update to the most current “Policies and Procedures” document for ULARA, dated February 1998. Numerous and substantial changes are being provided 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 is still working on the document in order to eventually provide a complete Draft of the Updated “Policies and Procedures” document to the Parties. The Watermaster’s outside counsel (BB&K) will also be asked to review and provide possible comments to the document once it become available.



The level of detail in the document proved to be challenging for update purposes, as significant review of historic documents (particularly the Judgment, the Report of Referee, and associated documents) is necessary to trace the history of certain Watermaster activities. As an example, the documents list the chain of successors to some of the smaller water rights holders, which the Watermaster is working to update.