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Placer Water Near Normal

By: Gray Allen, Chairman of the Board, (916) 783-4334

While most California farmers, businesses and citizens worry about severe water shortages this year, customers of the Placer County Water Agency can be confident that they have one of the most reliable water supplies in the state.

Why? Placer County is blessed with remarkably productive and consistently fecund watersheds on the Middle Fork of the American and the Rubicon rivers. PCWA manages the water produced in these two systems to assure county residents of a dependable supply of high-quality surface water year-in and year-out.

For 2009, PCWA projects that its customers for American River water, including the City of Roseville and San Juan Water District, will receive 100 percent of their committed PCWA Water supplies. The American and Rubicon river reservoirs are at normal levels for this time of year and the snowpack in those watersheds is about 70 percent of normal.

Storage in Spaulding Reservoir on the Yuba-Bear river system from which PCWA buys water for ninety percent of its retail customers is about normal, although the snowpack there is about half of normal. PCWA's new pumps on the American River can supplement the Yuba-Bear flows up to 20,000 acre feet, if necessary.

Bottom line: PCWA customers need to continue to use water efficiently. No one knows what next year will bring. Reservoirs could drop lower. Snowpack may shrink. We must all be wise in our use of this precious resource.

PCWA has led in the water efficiency arena. The agency installed water meters at all connections by 1968, adopted tiered water rates a decade ago to encourage efficiency, offers customers free advice and information on efficient water use, as well as rebates on

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efficient appliances. The agency conducts educational programs in schools and with homeowner associations. PCWA has consistently met regional water efficiency goals and was recognized in 2006 by the California Municipal Utilities Association for resource efficiency.

PCWA is a statewide advocate for good stewardship and water use efficiency, but does not believe that water saved in our county by wise usage should be given away to outside interests, which appears to be the way the wind is blowing these days.

Visionary Forefathers

That Placer County has full control of its water supply is a testament to the vision and determination of county leaders 50-plus years ago. While other foothill counties were losing their water rights to outside interests, Placer County secured water rights on the Middle Fork of the American River and its tributaries and on the Rubicon. It then built the Middle Fork American River Project with money secured by bonds approved by the citizens of the county.

The system of reservoirs, powerhouses, tunnels and pump stations captures winter rains and summer snowmelt, stores it, and releases it in a well-managed fashion to generate a billion kilowatt hours of electricity each year and provide clean surface water to county residents, businesses and farms.

These dependable flows fueled growth and development in Placer County. Working farms bloomed and thousands of acres of marginal land sprouted prosperous cities, towns and industrial parks. People from throughout the state and elsewhere moved to Placer County for its beauty, jobs, safe neighborhoods and excellent schools, none of which would be here without a dependable water supply.

Water, it is often said, is the new “gold” in California. It certainly is in Placer County. It is a treasure that the citizens of the county must protect from outsider’s continuing efforts to take away under the guise of statewide conservation, Bay-Delta fixes and drought declarations. Such efforts are viewed by those of us above the Delta as veiled attempts to grab north-state water for south-state development. It is up to us to protect what our forefathers created for this region: Placer water for Placer County!