



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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PCWA Response in Wake of Canal Failure: Conservation

AUBURN -- Water supplies to the Placer County Water Agency and its customers remain limited following a major break to a Pacific Gas & Electric Company water supply canal. A comprehensive report of the emergency was given to the PCWA Board of Directors at Thursday's (Apr. 21) board meeting.

"The message to all PCWA customers at this time is water conservation," said PCWA Director of Field Services Mike Nichol, who termed the incident the most serious outage he's seen in 22 years with the water agency.

PCWA staff and officials of the Pacific Gas and Electric Company briefed the board on their respective responses to the Apr. 19 failure of a portion of PG&E's Bear River Canal.

The canal is critically important for conveying water to PCWA and its customers. The PG&E canal was nearly full when a 40-foot section of it ruptured when ground beneath it slid down the hillside. The canal is located in rugged terrain along the Bear River canyon near Colfax.

PG&E Director of Power Generation Alvin Thoma who traveled from San Francisco and Bill Williams, PG&E Hydro Superintendent of PG&E's regional office, briefed the Board about the canal's failure.

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Thoma said inspectors, engineers, surveyors, foresters and construction workers were at the scene assessing damages, planning repairs, working with property owners and creating access to the remote site.

He said PG&E is studying all options for a permanent reconstruction of the canal and restoration of water supplies to the agency.

Thoma said PG&E had inspected the canal earlier this month and it showed no apparent signs of stress. He said the incident does not appear to be seismic related and is most likely due to saturated ground from this year's heavy rains.

PCWA staff described the agency's rapid response to the emergency and outlined a variety of strategies being pursued to both cope with and to keep water flowing to agency customers with limited supplies.

Agency General Manager David Breninger said, "The water agency is coordinating with the Nevada Irrigation District, City of Roseville, City of Lincoln and others, as well as pumping water from the agency's American River supplies to supplement flows to the PCWA water system. However, these sources will not make up for all of the shortage caused by the canal's failure."

"The agency is asking all water customers to voluntarily conserve, reduce water usage and to use water efficiently and wisely during the emergency," said Breninger.

In responding to the emergency and in striving to spread as much water as possible to customers across the agency's expansive Zone 1 irrigation canal system, PCWA had to immediately implement rolling canal system "water outages."

"Rotation of canal water availability is necessary so that we can equitably spread as much water and as often as possible to as many Zone 1 irrigation canal customers with our limited supplies. Rolling water outages will continue and may have to extend beyond 24-hour durations until PG&E completes canal repairs and full water supply flows are returned to PCWA," said Breninger.

He added, "Our agricultural growers in far western Placer County, Zone 5 will also receive limited water deliveries through the Auburn Ravine conveyance system."

Breninger urged irrigation canal customers “to implement their own contingency plans for storage, watering animals, livestock and crops while the agency is faced with diminished supplies.”

To alert irrigation canal water users to the seriousness of the situation, the agency staff activated its emergency alert telephone notification system, posted information on its website and sent letters to irrigation canal customers.

“Adjustments have also been made to the agency’s extensive treated water system to reduce usage system-wide,” said Breninger. He emphasized the need for “voluntary water conservation actions by every treated water customer during this emergency.”

He concluded, “At the moment, the recent cool and damp weather is working in everyone’s favor, but conditions will change as seasonal warming and demands for water pick up. As this occurs, it will become difficult for PCWA to meet every customer’s expectations for water until full supplies from PG&E to PCWA returns to normal conditions.”

The board thanked the PG&E representatives for their presence and the company’s response to the emergency. The board complemented PCWA staff for their swift actions in wake of the emergency.

Status reports about the emergency will be made at each board meeting. The next regular meeting is Thursday, May 5, 2:00 p.m., at the PCWA Business Center, 144 Ferguson Road, Auburn.

Information about the emergency is posted on the agency’s website at www.pcwa.net or by calling weekdays the PCWA Customer Services Center at (530) 823-4850 or toll-free (800) 464-0030 or by e-mail at customerservices@pcwa.net