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NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Conservation Urged

Water Shortage Emergency Considered in Placer County

AUBURN – The Placer County Water Agency is preparing to declare a water shortage emergency because its main water supply was severed when a Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) canal failed. General Manager David A. Breninger called this "a dire, catastrophic situation."

He said, "Staff is doing everything we can to strive to keep water flowing to our tens of thousands of customers with the very limited supplies available to us since Apr. 19 when the PG&E's Bear River Canal failed." The canal is the main water supply to PCWA and its customers.

Breninger said, "I'm extremely disappointed that more than 10 days after the incident PG&E has not been able to provide a realistic timetable for an emergency water bypass or a permanent repair to assure the prompt return of water supplies to PCWA for our customers."

Meeting in special session late Thursday afternoon (Apr. 28), the PCWA Board of Directors set a public hearing for Tuesday, May 10, to further review the situation and to consider an emergency water shortage declaration. The public hearing is set for 5:30 p.m. at the Holiday Inn conference room, 120 Grass Valley Highway, in Auburn.

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PG&E representatives said, at the April 28 Board meeting, that the repair is a top priority but the site remains unstable and unsafe for workers. "It's very difficult," said PG&E partnership coordinator Kevin Goishi. "We're talking about a very substantial structure on a landslide. The subsurface conditions are unknown."

PG&E has reviewed the site and is studying all options for a temporary bypass and permanent solution. Goishi said he is hopeful PG&E will be able to provide more information in coming days.

The slide that severed the canal is in a remote, rugged area near Colfax. At the time of the break, the canal was flowing at about 400 cubic feet of water per second (cfs). The supply is normally shared between PCWA and Nevada Irrigation District for their customers in Placer County.

"Normally up to 244 cfs of water would be flowing to PCWA, but now there is absolutely none," said Breninger.

Adjoining water utilities immediately responded to PCWA's call for help on April 19 by providing what they can of limited supplemental supplies to the Agency. "But this won't be enough water as the weather heats up and the demand for water increases," Breninger said. "All PCWA irrigation and treated water customers are asked to conserve now what limited water is available." Breninger expects in the weeks ahead the agency to face "extremely serious shortages and probably won't be able to meet many customers' water needs."

"Basically without a massive infusion of water very soon from PG&E to PCWA thousands of our customers face a stark reality of little to no water in certain regions of our vast service area," added Breninger.

Serious impacts are anticipated to irrigation water customers who use canal water along the Interstate-80 corridor from Christian Valley, Bowman, north Auburn, City of Auburn, Shirland Tract, Ophir and Newcastle. The agency supplies nearly 4000 canal water customers. Rolling canal outages began in many areas at the first reports of the PG&E canal's failure that severed all supplies to PCWA.

Agency officials expressed extremely serious concern for all of their customers.

PCWA directors noticed the irony of the situation, an inability to provide enough water following one of the wettest winters on record. “There’s water everywhere but we can’t get to it,” said District 2 Director Alex Ferreira. “We’re in a terrible position.”

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.