

The Signal

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The Santa Clarita Valley water-supply stimulus package

As the water equivalent of a recession deepens, we at the Castaic Lake Water Agency are looking ahead into 2009 and expecting we'll dip into our reserves.

A year ago, when we talked about the water supply outlook for 2008, we explained how the Santa Clarita Valley's diversified water supply portfolio worked much the same as a diversified financial portfolio works for a smart investor.

For many years, we have worked hard to secure a variety of water supply sources to ensure that, in times of drought and/or uncertainty about the adequacy of our annual allotment of state-supplied water, we and the four local water retailers are able to continue providing a reliable supply of water to the people we serve here in the valley.

This diversified portfolio always has been important as much for its function as a "safety net" as it is for year-to-year supply. Fortunately, in most years, we are able to

winter and coming spring, and how much our residents and businesses here in the Santa Clarita Valley are able to conserve.

We're highly optimistic about our community's ability to conserve because the indicators are our valley is responding well to the efforts of CLWA and the four local retailers to promote a new ethic of wisely using our precious water resources, not just in times of drought but on an ongoing basis, too.

Precipitation is another story. Despite the recent storms — which, of course, help — California is still on the verge of enduring the worst multiyear drought in recorded history.

Where does this leave our water supply outlook for 2009? The short answer is we know how much water the SCV is likely to need this year, and we know we have enough to meet that demand.

It pencils out something like this: We expect local demand to be as much as



Jerry Gladbach

SCV Voices

avoid using the safety net — but in 2009, and after almost three years of drought, our efforts to "bank" water and enhance the reliability of our State Water Project supply will pay off.

How much will we have to tap into our reserves? That depends primarily upon two factors: How much more rain and snow California receives for the remainder of this

78,000 acre-feet. (An acre-foot is enough water to cover an acre of land a foot deep.)

To give you an idea of just how bad the state's current situation is, our contracted amount of water from the State Water Project is 95,200 acre-feet — more than enough to meet our local demand all by itself.

However, CLWA and other water agencies throughout California recognize we can't plan on being allocated 100 percent of that contract amount each and every year.

Not only is the state dealing with the drought, but we're also being affected by court-imposed restrictions on pumping water from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta due to concerns about impacts on the Delta smelt, a fish native to the Delta.

What do all of these things mean for our state allocation? In short, we may only get 15 percent of our contract amount this year — or 14,280 acre-feet.

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This amount could change if the spring is painfully dry up north — or delightfully wet — but for now we are planning on this amount from the State Water Project.

By comparison, last year — which everyone agreed was a challenging year in terms of water supply — our State Water Project allocation was 35 percent, or 33,320 acre-feet.

The 15 percent is the bad news. The good news is, we received a pleasant surprise this year: We're actually "carrying over" some of our State Water Project water from 2008 into 2009.

That's because the water is treated like "rollover minutes" on a cellular phone plan. Any SWP water we don't use, we are allowed to "carry over" to the following year.

Due to local residents' increasingly smart use of water — thank you very much — and our own planning efforts, we are rolling over 14,600 acre-feet of water from 2008 into 2009.

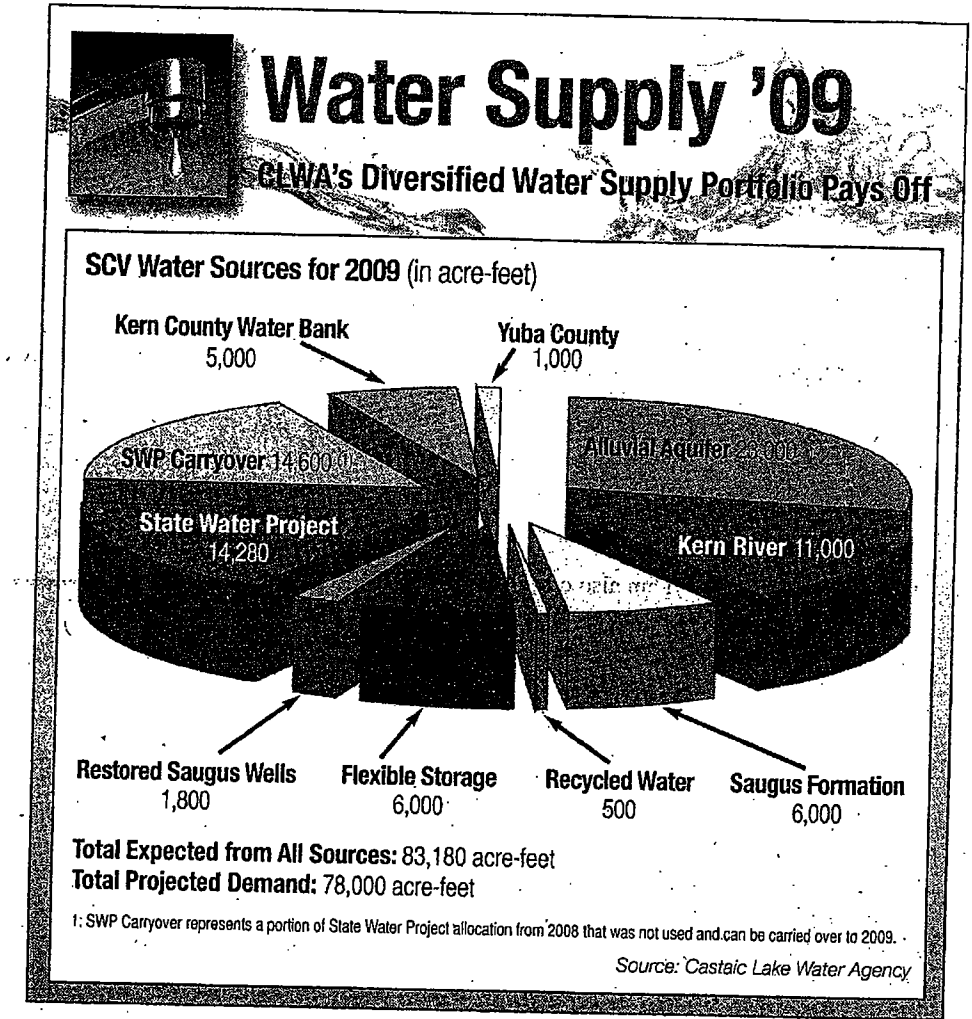
That doesn't make us "rich" in state water by any means, but it's helpful, and it brings our total expected State Water Project available supply to 28,880 acre-feet, which is about a third of what we need.

With the reduced State Water Project supply this year, we're not expecting much in the way of carryover for next year.

We get a little over another third of what we need from local groundwater sources. We can expect approximately 23,000 acre-feet from the alluvial aquifer, and another 6,000 acre-feet from the Saugus formation. These underground sources have always been a key piece of the local water puzzle, and remain so now.

There's also some more groundwater we'll start pumping this year, thanks to the planned completion this spring of the treatment plant to remove perchlorate from groundwater contaminated by the former Whittaker-Bermite munitions manufacturing plant.

This treatment plant and associated pipelines have been years in the making and are being built at no ratepayer expense. This is because of a favorable set-



tlement of litigation by CLWA and local water retailers that ensured the property's current and former owners take responsibility for the cleanup.

We're nearing completion of construction on this much-anticipated project, and this spring the new treatment plant will allow us to bring back into service two wells that had been shut down due to the contamination.

The result: Another 1,800 acre-feet of groundwater from the Saugus Formation goes back into the supply mix this year. (That quantity is expected to double in 2010.)

For 2009, 30,800 acre-feet of groundwater, and 28,880 from the State Water Project gets us to 59,680 acre-feet — around

18,000 to go.

We'll get a good chunk of that from the Kern River, as a result of an agreement we made a couple of years ago with the Buena Vista and Rosedale-Rio Bravo Water Storage Districts to acquire the rights to 11,000 acre-feet per year of Kern River water. The really nice thing about this water is it's not affected by fluctuations in its availability as our State Water Project supply is. Whatever happens, we get the full 11,000 acre-feet, year in and year out.

Updated total: 70,680 acre-feet, and we're coming down the home stretch. We'll close the gap by tapping into some reserves.

At this point, it appears we may draw up to 6,000 acre-feet from our "flexible

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storage" in Castaic Lake. We also expect to draw 5,000 acre-feet from a groundwater bank in Kern County where we have previously stored water, and about 1,000 acre-feet from a water supply program in Yuba County that enables us to buy extra water in most years.

Add in 500 acre-feet of water from our recycling program and that brings our total availability to approximately 83,180 acre-feet — more than enough to meet the expected demand.

Considering the water supply situation throughout California these days, at CLWA we consider ourselves fortunate to be well-positioned to withstand the fluctuations in state supply. Other California agencies face much more serious circumstances.

However, make no mistake: Conservation is imperative, and we are in fact expecting to meet demand in 2009 by tapping into our strategic reserves.

We don't expect the state's situation to improve dramatically anytime soon, so it's as important as ever to promote an ongoing ethic of smart water use, now and even after the current drought is officially "over."

Putting the conservation issue into the context of 2009, if we can even achieve 10 percent conservation, that would reduce demand by 7,800 acre-feet and allow us to keep that much more water in our strategic reserves. If the drought continues into next year then that's water we'll put to good use in 2010.

It seems as if our community is receptive to developing a water-wise way of life. For example, in 2008 we experienced about a 2-percent reduction in demand, despite the fact that our number of water service connections increased.

In other words, local residents used less water in 2008 than they did in 2007. All we can say is, thank you and keep it up.

With good planning and smart use of our precious water resources, we're confident that the Santa Clarita Valley's water supply will emerge from this "water recession" as robust as ever.

Jerry Gladbach is a member of the Castaic Lake Water Agency Board of Directors and chairs the CLWA Water Resources Committee. His column reflects the Agency's views and not necessarily those of The Signal.