



# RIVERSIDE PUBLIC UTILITIES

## Water Committee

**BOARD OF PUBLIC UTILITIES – WATER COMMITTEE**

**DATE: DECEMBER 8, 2021**

**SUBJECT: CALIFORNIA DROUGHT UPDATE**

**ISSUE:**

Receive an update on the California Drought.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

That the Board of Public Utilities Water Committee receive an update on the California drought and provide staff direction on future presentations relating to the Water Shortage Contingency Plan.

**BACKGROUND:**

Past and Current Drought Timeline from 2014-2021:

- 2014 – Governor Brown declares a State of Emergency due to drought.
- July 2014 – The State Water Board adopted Resolution No. 2014-0038, which added to the Board's regulations through the emergency rulemaking process, requirements for monthly reporting of urban water use (now permanent reporting), and prohibiting certain wasteful water use practices during the drought.
- 2015 – Governor Brown signs Executive Order mandating statewide cutbacks on urban water use.
- April 2017 – Governor Brown signed Executive Order B-40-17, rescinding the drought emergency declaration, while retaining prohibitions on wasteful water use practices. These expired in November 2017.
- 2020 – Drought conditions return and are further exacerbated in 2021.

**DISCUSSION:**

In July 2021, Governor Newsom declared a drought emergency for several counties (most of them in northern California) and issued Executive Order N-10-21 urging residents to voluntarily reduce water usage by 15% compared to 2020, amid the State's second driest year on record.

On October 19, 2021, the Governor extended the drought emergency statewide and further urged

Californians to step up their water conservation efforts as identified in Executive Order N-10-21. Analyzing data from the urban water supplier monthly water conservation reports submitted by retailers, the State Water Board has been monitoring Californians' water consumption by comparing monthly use to the same month in 2020. Using the Governor's recent October proclamation as a baseline month, a 15% reduction to RPU's October customer demand would equal around 955 AF. RPU customer demand for October 2021 dropped 520 AF or 8% from 2020.

This proclamation also enables the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) to ban wasteful water practices, including the use of potable water for washing sidewalks and driveways. SWRCB has not yet issued a ban on wasteful water practices as of the preparation of this report, but Riverside's Water Conservation Ordinance (Chapter 14.22.010) already prohibits the same unreasonable uses of water last banned by the SWRCB during the 2012-2016 drought. Unless the SWRCB adopts additional uses not included in the City's existing Water Conservation Ordinance, a statewide ban on wasteful water use practices will likely not impact Riverside.

### *What does the proclamation mean for Riverside?*

The Governor's call is for a voluntary reduction to minimize deliveries from the State Water Project, which is currently heavily impacted by drought conditions. Riverside's water supply is presently entirely sourced from local groundwater and does not rely on imported water for water production deliveries. Based on current demand and supply, Riverside anticipates sufficient water supply for the next 5-dry years (per the Urban Water Management Plan's Drought Risk Assessment) and continues to encourage customers to use water efficiently and adhere to the City's prohibitions on wasteful water practices. Additionally, Riverside coordinates with Western Municipal Water District to align its messaging for customers in the RPU service area to use water wisely.

Although Riverside has sufficient water supply during this statewide drought, lack of local rainfall and reduction of imported water used by neighboring water agencies does impact water levels within the Bunker Hill and Riverside groundwater basins, from which Riverside obtains most of its water. The local region has been experiencing a prolonged dry period since the late 1990s and has observed a decline in water levels of approximately 150 feet. Over the last year alone, RPU has observed a 5 to 15 foot drop in water levels. For this reason, RPU has invested in and is exploring additional groundwater recharge projects to continue to ensure water reliability during periods of drought.

### *What actions can Riverside consider taking?*

In the Inland Empire, between 50-70% of water use can be attributed to outdoor landscaping. Demand typically increases and peaks during hot summer months and significantly decreases during rainy months. Indoor water consumption is generally consistent. As such, outdoor water use represents the single greatest opportunity for water savings among residential customers. Ramping up outdoor water use efficiency programs and implementing policies and ordinances designed to reduce outdoor water waste and usage are the most effective tools at a water suppliers' disposal for achieving demand cutbacks.

Currently, Riverside is in Stage One – Normal Water Supply (0% reduction) of its Water Shortage Contingency Plan (WSCP). For context, every California water supplier is required to have a WSCP as part of its Urban Water Management Plan. A WSCP contains a supplier's supply and demand monitoring framework, the process for triggering a shortage, and response actions to be

taken during a specific water shortage. Riverside's Stage One is voluntary and encourages best practices such as irrigating landscapes when water is least likely to evaporate (between 6 p.m. and 10 a.m.). Current outreach efforts are in effect including marketing of water use efficiency programs (e.g. available rebates on turf replacement, weather-based irrigation controllers, high-efficiency sprinkler nozzles) and encouraging customers to continue to use water wisely.

If Riverside was once again mandated to reduce its water consumption by the State, it could potentially move forward with one or both of the following options based on the current plan.

Riverside could enter Stage Two of its WSCP. Moving into Stage Two – Minimum Water Shortage (<15% reduction) requires a City Council resolution. This stage is mandatory and asks customers to reduce their water usage by up to 15%. Stage Two introduces more customer demand reduction actions while Stage One measures remain in effect. These include:

- Irrigation of landscaping is prohibited on any day of the week from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
- Properties may not be irrigated more than three times per week.
- All leaks, improperly adjusted sprinklers, or other water appurtenances requiring repair or adjustment shall be corrected within 72 hours of notification by the City.
- Construction operations receiving water from a construction meter or water truck shall not use water unnecessarily other than those required by regulatory agencies.

In addition to or independent of customer demand reduction actions implemented through the WSCP, Riverside has the option to implement operational changes. This can include decreasing the use of potable water on City managed landscapes (WA-7 Interruptible Irrigation Service), expediting planned system improvement projects that include reduction in water loss (e.g. replacement of water mains experiencing higher rates of leaks and breaks), and reductions in flushing of hydrants and dead-end lines.

Upon adoption of Riverside's 2020 Urban Water Management Plan, the issue of how and if Riverside should participate in any future statewide drought mandates emerged. Riverside has, during the last drought period, sought legal action for relief from these mandates because our supplies are not directly served from imported water sources. The Committee can discuss a similar path of action if mandatory restrictions are imposed. There is certainly a local water rights and local control issue to this perspective; however, there is growing data that indicates local groundwater basins are affected by lower precipitation, reduced imported water being used by customers that overlie the basin and the reduction of permeable surfaces across the basin. Therefore, it is staff's recommendation to also consider the effectiveness of the current WSCP through the lens of the Riverside 2025 Strategic Plan.

The strategic plan identifies important elements such as environmental stewardship, fiscal responsibility and equity as important principles to evaluate City policy decisions. The current Stage Two through Stage Four of the WSCP is designed to reduce outdoor water use and overall customer water demands. Riverside recognized some unintended consequences from the policy implementation during the last drought. The sustainability and health of our natural environment was negatively impacted especially relating to the health of existing trees in public and private spaces. Staff recommends the Committee begin a discussion on how to weave the protection of Riverside's tree canopy, especially in public spaces, into the requirements on all stages of mandatory water restrictions. This level of engagement will require its own report and presentation at a future meeting and staff asks for feedback and direction from the Committee.

## **STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:**

RPU's engagement with the statewide drought supports the following City Council Strategic Plan 2025 priorities and goals:

### *Community Well-Being*

Goal 2.6. Strengthen community preparedness for emergencies to ensure effective response and recovery.

### *Environmental Stewardship*

Goal 4.2. Sustainably manage local water resources to maximize reliability and advance water reuse to ensure safe, reliable, and affordable water to our community

Being engaged with California's statewide drought updates aligns with City Council's Strategic Plan 2025 Cross-Cutting Threads as follows:

1. **Community Trust** – Riverside is actively engaged with the statewide drought and is providing timely and reliable information to inform policy makers on potential actions that may need to be taken to protect and serve the public interest.
2. **Equity** – Riverside has developed a Water Conservation Ordinance and Water Shortage Contingency Plan to ensure the finite water resources of the City can be available to all members of the community.
3. **Fiscal Responsibility** – Riverside will continue to evaluate the potential fiscal impact to the Water Utility from reduced water usage by customers. Regardless of whether the State mandates or calls for voluntary reduction in water usage, Riverside will ensure responsible management of the City's financial resources while providing quality public services to all.
4. **Innovation** – Riverside is keeping abreast of all drought updates in order to respond to and prepare for any potential impacts to the community. It is collaborating with regional water providers to ensure cohesive messaging that meet the needs of the region's residents.
5. **Sustainability & Resiliency** – Riverside has developed a Water Conservation Ordinance and Water Shortage Contingency Plan to manage the finite water resources of the City to ensure there will be adequate water supply in the near-term and for generations to come.

## **FISCAL IMPACT:**

There is no fiscal impact for the update on the California Drought. During the last drought, Riverside residents answered the call for conservation and reduced their consumption by 20%. Riverside Public Utilities saw a financial impact of \$33 million in lost revenue. A 15% demand cutback is projected to cause another financial impact.

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Attachments:

1. Proclamation of State of Emergency
2. 2020 Water Shortage Contingency Plan
3. Presentation