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FUTURISTIC NEW TOOL IN CLOUD SEEDING:DRONES

February 29th, 2016 by Matt Weiser · 6 min read ·

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Cloud seeding is an important tool that's been used in California to boost the mountain snowpack. It's often done by aircraft flying in dangerous storm conditions. Now drones are poised to take over some of that work, possibly alleviating some of the risk and saving money

Scientists at the Desert Research Institute in Reno recently succeeded in conducting the world's first cloud-seeding exercise using an octocopter drone. The goal is to make cloud seeding more affordable and more adaptable to adverse weather conditions.

Cloud seeding has been conducted successfully for decades over the Sierra Nevada. It involves discharging silver iodide particles from aircraft. Usually this is done by igniting flares – just like a roadside emergency flare – attached to a plane's wings. The flares

contain silver iodide, which causes water droplets within the clouds to form ice crystals, which eventually become snowflakes as they grow larger.

Studies have shown cloud seeding, when done correctly, can boost the snowpack between 8 and 15 percent. But flights are often limited by icing conditions, which pose a danger to pilots and people on the ground in the event of a crash.

That's where drones come in. A drone can operate in marginal conditions that might be too dangerous for a manned flight. A drone can also fly closer to the ground, in some circumstances, to take advantage of ideal atmospheric conditions. And it can do this more affordably.

Water Deeply recently spoke with Adam Watts, an assistant research professor at the Desert Research Institute, about the successful trial. He also discussed plans with partner Drone America to eventually launch "swarms" of drones to seed large areas.

Adam Watts of the Desert Research Institute, shown far right, expects that squadrons of fixed-wing drones like this will one day conduct large cloud-seeding operations to boost precipitation over the Sierra Nevada. He's shown with from left, Alyssa Frampton, Kyle

Pruett of Drone America, and Frank McDonough of the Desert Research Institute. (Kevin Clifford/Drone America)

Water Deeply: Why use drones in cloud seeding?

Adam Watts: Cloud seeding, when done from the air, does involve some risks, such as flying into icing conditions. Using unmanned aircraft reduces the risk to humans, both in the aircraft and on the ground. So it allows you to explore more options that might involve taking on a bit more risk than you'd want if you're using manned aircraft. Another potential benefit is cost. If all you need to do is take a lightweight payload up, of course a drone can do that without also carrying a human aloft.

Water Deeply: Are there any advantages for cloud seeding that drones bring to the party?

Adam Watts: The types of payloads we developed for the unmanned aircraft are very similar to what we use for the manned aircraft. I would say the difference and the potential advantage might lie again in that risk area where you might be able to use an unmanned aircraft to fly closer to the ground than you would allow your manned aircraft to fly. You might also be able to have an unmanned aircraft deployed potentially at night or under other conditions. You're able to take on additional mission profiles that a manned aircraft wouldn't be able to do without incorporating an unacceptable level of risk.

Water Deeply: In what ways was your recent experiment successful?

Adam Watts: With the octocopter from Drone America, we've demonstrated the ability of an autonomous unmanned aircraft to fly a cloud-seeding payload. To our knowledge, it seems to be a world first. I don't believe anybody else out there has flown a cloud-seeding payload aboard any kind of unmanned aircraft. It feels kind of weird saying that, but let us go ahead and say that. This is a big deal, but its going to be an even bigger deal as we go forward.

Water Deeply: Why is it going to be a big deal?

Adam Watts: I think it's going to be a big deal because we're going to be developing concepts of operation that are going to be helpful to a large suite of other applications. Such as how we deploy the aircraft with the kinds of forecasting information we use to support navigation, and procedures for recovery of the aircraft. It's fair to say we're pioneering some things that are going to be enabling the cloud-seeding mission but will support some other things.

As it specifically relates to cloud seeding, I wouldn't want to get overblown about the implications for solving the water crisis. But down the road, it could be something that becomes a useful tool for enhancing precipitation in larger areas. Fixed cloud-seeding generators on the ground, they can put out a lot of effort when weather conditions are right. But they have to have the wind set up in the right way. You can envision a scenario in the future where, in addition to ground generators, you might have remote stations with these autonomous aircraft staged for launch. That might expand your ability in responding to a forecast in the safety and warmth of your office to do aerial cloud seeding.

Water Deeply: How long before drones can be used for active cloud seeding?

Adam Watts: If we do everything we are going to try to do, if the weather conditions cooperate, the project this year should result in an operational cloud-seeding flight. That's going to be at a modest scale. How long might it be before this is readily available for the organizations that do cloud seeding? That's hard to say. It's going to depend on funding to continue to develop these tools.

Water Deeply: How does the cloud-seeding payload work?

Watts: It's pretty similar to the flare racks on manned aircraft. This is simply a smaller version of that. In the same way that a pilot of a manned aircraft flips a switch to ignite the flares, we'll be able to do that from the ground. We'll be able to do that on the basis of where the aircraft is located, and what the weather radar tells us about where the clouds are.

Water Deeply: What needs to happen legally for this to become a regular thing?

Adam Watts: From the standpoint of operating from the side of a mountain, we're going to be operating what's called "beyond visual flight." That's a challenge we're going to have to overcome. Beyond line of site operations are currently very tightly regulated in the U.S. So we'll be working closely with our partners in the FAA on making sure we satisfy those requirements. This is going to be kind of a pioneer, pathfinding sort of project. We're in a time where we're seeing some maturation of regulations governing unmanned aircraft. We're seeing some exciting technology being incorporated to be sure we can fly unmanned aircraft safely. My hope is that any regulations are going to be adaptable to the situations and to the technologies that enable safe operations.

I also hope the public continues to see unmanned aircraft as really valuable tools that actually increase our ability to fly safely. And that the regulations adopted at all the levels reflect that and that there aren't knee-jerk regulations that restrict our ability to operate. Other countries are doing it safely, and we don't want to fall behind in these high-tech fields.

Water Deeply: Do you foresee that drones will replace manned aircraft in cloud seeding?

Adam Watts: I really think that complementing each other is what we will see. I don't like to think of unmanned aircraft in terms of replacing manned aircraft. We talk about certain scenarios where I think a pilot would be glad to no longer be flying a particular mission because it's risky.

Water Deeply: Is range a limitation in the drones you are using?

Adam Watts: It is, and i think you've hit on one of the reasons we can envision drones are not going to replace manned aircraft. You might have a couple of hours flight duration (with a drone). Which could be really useful for some cloud-seeding events, but might not be sufficient in others, and for those you'd want a manned aircraft. At the same time, we're seeing rapid advances in propulsion technologies as we see batteries get better and new types of advanced propulsion get better.

Water Deeply: What does the future hold?

Adam Watts: Among the next steps will be improvements to the payload and putting the payload on board the type of aircraft that's going to give us the kind of performance we want.

More and better is going to be coming along. For one thing that (octocopter) aircraft is certainly not ideal for the cloud-seeding mission. Really, to get big successes like we want, we're going to be using a newly developed platform. What we're working on with our industry partner, Drone America, is a fixed-wing aircraft that's going to be much better able to fly in the wind and in icing conditions and it will carry a larger cloud-seeding payload too.

We might be able to use swarms or networks of these drones flying in a formation, which would then really be cost effective and would allow us to seed areas and enhance precipitation over a larger area than you can do with a single aircraft — maybe without increasing costs much beyond using a manned aircraft.

Top image: A drone operated by the Desert Research Institute and Drone America successfully deploys a cloud-seeding flare in Spanish Springs, Nev., on January 27, 2016. (Kevin Clifford/Drone America)

Climate report forecasts warmer, less reliable Truckee River

 Benjamin Spillman, bspillman@rgj.com 10:42 a.m. PDT March 29, 2016

Remainder of 21st century expected to include warmer temperatures in Great Basin, less snow in Sierra Nevada

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Local fishing guide Rob Anderson looks at fish gathered under a shade structure that was constructed by someone hoping to help the fish survive as the river continues to dry on July 6 2015. NDOW asked anglers to stay off the Truckee River when conditions are bad for fish (ie, the afternoon when the water gets hot).(Photo: Andy Barron, Andy Barron/RGJ)Buy Photo

An updated report on climate change that forecasts less snow in the Sierra Nevada and warmer temperatures across the Great Basin doesn't bode well for fishing and water sports in the Truckee River.

And while average to above average mountain snow in winter 2015-16 has provided a welcome reprieve from five years of drought conditions, the long-term forecast for the remainder of the century is a different story.

The latest version of the Bureau of Reclamation's SECURE Water Act Report forecasts a continued warming trend that threatens to undermine environmental features that make the Truckee River a vibrant place for fishing and other water sports.

"If we're seeing these different flow patterns and water getting really warm really early in the year, that is going to have a negative effect," said Travis Hawks, regional fisheries biologist for the Nevada Department of Wildlife.

RENO GAZETTE JOURNAL
Hot in here? Warming climate bad news for Sierra snow

Anglers aren't the only ones concerned with how the changing climate will affect the river.

Longtime Truckee River kayaker Charles Albright said reduced snowmelt and more precipitation in the form of rain will make for less reliable flows and earlier peaks.

"For folks like us who play at the (whitewater) park, you are not going to be having as much fun," Albright said.

Determined kayakers will likely make the effort to get in the river whenever it peaks, even if it means using wetsuits and paddling earlier in the spring.

But casual weekend warriors who tend to wait until later in the spring to take boats out are more likely to encounter flows lower than the historical average, if the long-term forecast is accurate.

"Summer boaters who wait for it to be warm, they are not going to have a chance to boat, or much less of a chance," Albright said.

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Photo by Andy Barron --- 130503 Kayakers Sage Donnelly, 12, left, Cameron O'Conner,12, center, and Nathan O'Conner, 11, use their paddles to splash themselves with water while kayaking on the Truckee River on May 3, 2013. (Photo: Photo by Andy Barron, RGJ)

The report, which has segments for several major Western river basins, says the mean annual temperature in the Truckee River Basin, an area that includes Reno, Carson City and Lake Tahoe, is expected to increase five to six degrees Fahrenheit during the 21st century.

And it forecasts a 10- to 20-inch decrease in April 1 snowpack on the west side of the basin as warmer temperatures result in more storms producing rain instead of snow.

"That is really expected to impact the amount of runoff that is generated, particularly in the spring," said Katharine Dahm, a Bureau of Reclamation researcher.

The report does project a slight increase in overall precipitation, in part because a warmer atmosphere can hold more moisture, but it would come in the form of rain instead of snow.

The cumulative result, Dahm said, would be peak runoff dates arriving as many as 19 days sooner than what's typical.

“It is probably one of the most dramatic effects,” she said of the timing shift, which is projected to be greater in the Truckee Basin than in other Western basins.

The Colorado River Basin, for example, is projected to see a 12-day shift in peak runoff.

“Those impacts are expected to be fairly severe in the Truckee,” she said.

The report is an update to a 2011 report that looked at similar issues, largely from the standpoint of water management, which is under the purview of the Bureau of Reclamation.

The 2016 version relies heavily on the Truckee River Basin Study, which was conducted with the Bureau of Reclamation, local water agencies in Placer and Washoe counties, the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and the Truckee River Flood Management Authority.

It covers 119 miles of the Truckee River, from its headwaters in the Carson Range to its final destination at Pyramid Lake and the surrounding 3,000-square-mile river basin.

In addition to warmer temperatures and less snow, the report states there could be more overall precipitation, mainly in the upper portion of the basin.

But with more of the precipitation coming as rain instead of snow, it also means higher variability in river flows and less water in the lower basin in the summer.

Hawks said that could spell trouble for the ongoing recovery of the Lahontan cutthroat trout, which have been enjoying a resurgence in recent years in Pyramid Lake, where anglers are reporting a greater volume of large trout.

Buy Photo

The Truckee River at McCarran Ranch east of Reno on March 21, 2013, following a restoration project led by The Nature Conservancy. (Photo: Marilyn Newton/RGJ, RGJ)

“We are going to have issues with maintaining a population down there, keeping flow all the way to Pyramid Lake,” he said.

Although the warming climate poses a threat to habitat, there are opportunities to protect the Truckee’s fishery.

Hawks said fish experts were pleasantly surprised at how well the McCarran Ranch restoration project helped preserve fish in the lower Truckee last year when much of the river was a mere trickle.

“We were fearing we were going to lose that lower river fishery,” Hawks said.

The restoration project, created and managed by The Nature Conservancy, created riffles and pools to provide habitat for trout and insects, reworked the meandering channel to a more natural flow, raised the river bottom and narrowed the width to support native vegetation and restored native plants that help filter excess nutrients.

“Deeper water and better habitat was able to keep cooler temperatures,” he said

Forecasters say Lake Mead water shortage could be on the way

Julie Jacobson / AP

In this April 16, 2013, file photo, the high water mark for Lake Mead is seen on Hoover Dam and its spillway near Boulder City.

Associated Press Published Friday, March 11, 2016 | 11:25 a.m.

PHOENIX — Federal forecasters say a warm, dry February has increased the chances that Lake Mead will have a water shortage by 2018.

El Nino brought a snowy winter to the Rocky Mountains, but things dried up in February, reported The Arizona Republic. As a result, Lake Powell will likely only hold 80 percent of its long-term average amount of water by spring, according to the Colorado Basin River Forecast Center.

Lake Powell gathers most of the water that ultimately flows to Lake Mead.

"The snow conditions have not been so great," forecaster Greg Smith told water managers on Thursday, "and it was quite dry in February."

Weather stations in the river basin have also recorded above-average temperatures, which could make future droughts even harsher. Past research indicates that the region's droughts will continue to get more intense as the changing climate warms the West, said Connie Woodhouse, a geography professor at the University of Arizona.

The latest projections from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, which manages Hoover Dam, give Lake Mead only a 37 percent chance of falling into shortage conditions next year. But that chance rises to 59 percent in 2018.

The U.S. Interior secretary declares a shortage whenever an annual study projects the reservoir level will be less than 1,075 feet above sea level on Jan. 1. The water is expected to drop below that threshold this summer but recover in time to prevent a shortage declaration for 2017.

A shortage could force Arizona and Nevada to implement water restrictions, and some Arizona farmers would lose the water that flows to them through the Central Arizona Project canal.

Southern Nevada Water Authority wants to ban landscape watering on Sundays

A landscaper talks on his cellphone as water sprinklers spray water at St. Rose Dominican Hospital, de Lima campus, in Henderson. (Bizuayehu Tesfaye/Las Vegas Review-Journal) Follow Bizua Tesfaye on Twitter @bizutesfaye

By HENRY BREAN
LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

The Southern Nevada Water Authority wants to make Sunday a permanent day of rest for your sprinklers.

The valley's wholesale water agency is recommending a change in the landscape watering schedule that would limit irrigation to six days a week instead of seven during the summer.

Officials estimate the move would save as much as 900 million gallons of water during the hottest part of the year.

It is also likely to cost local water agencies about $1.3 million a year in lost revenue from water sales.

Doug Bennett, authority conservation manager, said the change should be an easy one to make for most people since research shows that less than half of customers water their yards seven days a week during the summer anyway.

He added that lawns and other landscaping seem to do just fine if left without water for a day or two a week from May 1 to Aug. 31, when irrigation is allowed everyday.

"We see this as an opportunity to take our conservation effort up a notch," Bennett said.

Water authority board members are slated to vote on the proposal at their next meeting at 9 a.m. Thursday at the agency's headquarters in the Molasky Building in downtown Las Vegas.

The board also will be asked to consider uniformrules governing fountains and other water features. Bennett said those rules differ among the county and the cities that make up the water authority, so staff is recommending the same rules for everyone to "tie up loose ends."

If approved, the changes to the conservation rules will have to be ratified by each of the authority's member agencies. Bennett said that will take time, so he doesn't expect the new rules to kick in until next year.

The ban on Sunday sprinkler use most likely will be voluntary this summer, he said.

Landscape watering on Sundays is prohibited in spring and fall, when irrigation is limited to three assigned days per week, and in winter, when it is restricted to a single assigned day per week.

This is marks the first significant change to the watering schedule since it was imposed 13 years ago, but Bennett does not expect the change to hurt the quality of life or the condition of anyone's landscaping.

"We think it's something the community can handle," he said.

Already, residents have embraced conservation measures introduced in 2003 as a temporary response to ongoing drought on the Colorado River, which supplies about 90 percent of the community's water.

Those rules were made permanent as part of a broader conservation program that authority officials say has cut Southern Nevada's water consumption by 30 percent since 2002, even though the population grew by about 500,000 people.

The community has banned front lawns at new homes, limited grass in backyards and at commercial properties, clamped down on fountains, misters and car washes, and plowed more than $200 million into a turf-rebate program that has paid people to rip out 178 million square feet of thirsty turf and replace it with desert landscaping.

Last year, the authority upped the rebate from $1.50 to $2 per square foot in hopes of spurring more water-saving landscape conversions at homes and businesses. So far, the plan seems to be working. Bennett said applications for the cash-for-grass program are up 80 percent over last year at this time.

Contact Henry Brean at hbrean@reviewjournal.com or 702-383-0350. Follow @RefriedBrean on Twitter.

Activists demand action against industrial chemical in water

Posted: Mar 15, 2016 10:32 AM PDT Tuesday, March 15, 2016 1:32 PM EDT*Updated: Mar 16, 2016*

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By MARY ESCH
Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) - Prized for its ability to make things super-slick, it was used for decades in the manufacture of Teflon pans, Gore-Tex jackets, ski wax, carpets and the linings of pizza boxes and microwave popcorn bags.

Now, with the suspected cancer-causing chemical PFOA being phased out in the U.S., it is still very much around, turning up in the water in factory towns across the country - most recently in upstate New York and Vermont - where it is blamed by residents for cancers and other maladies.

The latest cases have brought renewed demands that the Environmental Protection Agency regulate PFOA the way it does arsenic, lead and dozens of other contaminants, and set stringent, enforceable limits on how much of the substance can be in drinking water.

"Where is the government that is supposed to protect people and the environment? It's an outrage," said Tracy Carluccio of the Delaware Riverkeeper Network, which uncovered PFOA, or perfluorooctanoic acid, in tap water in New Jersey a decade ago.

In their defense, EPA officials said that the agency has been considering for years whether regulations are needed for PFOA and related perfluorinated chemicals, but that it is a drawn-out testing and evaluation process dictated by the federal Safe Drinking Water Act. In the meantime, the EPA has taken action around the country to fine companies and force them to clean up such chemicals.

For now, there are no mandatory limits on how much PFOA, also called C8, can be in drinking water. The same goes for its cousin perfluorooctane sulfonate, or PFOS, which is used in firefighting foam. The Pentagon is checking for traces of PFOS in the water at 664 U.S. military sites where fire or crash training has been conducted.

As part of its review of such chemicals, the EPA ordered nationwide testing of water supplies in 2013.

Of 4,764 water supplies, 103 systems in 29 states had trace amounts of PFOA, but none exceeded 400 parts per trillion, EPA's advisory level for short-term exposure - water you drink for only a few weeks. Seven had levels slightly over 100 ppt, the new advisory level for long-term exposure - for the water you drink for years - that the EPA is expected to set this spring.

But the EPA's national survey didn't tell the whole story.

Towns the size of Hoosick Falls, New York, whose water supply serves just 4,500 people, weren't included in the testing. Its PFOA level of 600 ppt was discovered in village wells in 2014 only because residents, concerned about what they perceived as a high cancer rate in the plastics factory town, demanded testing.

In January, after the lead crisis in Flint, Michigan, focused national attention on water contamination, EPA and New York officials warned people in Hoosick Falls not to drink the water. The state is promising a new water supply with a price tag of $10 million.

More recently, testing turned up PFOA at about 100 ppt in drinking water in nearby Petersburgh, New York, and North Bennington, Vermont, which also had plastics plants. On Tuesday, Vermont officials said a second round of water testing in North Bennington yielded readings of up to 2,730 ppt.

Michael Hickey, a local insurance underwriter, exposed the contamination in Hoosick Falls, a bucolic community near the Vermont state line known as the hometown of folk artist Grandma Moses.

"My father died of kidney cancer. My grandmother had kidney cancer," Hickey said. "My concern isn't really about me; it's about my 5-year-old son."

At the least, health and environmental advocates say, communities that have factories and other installations that used the chemical should test their water.

"I would consider it an urgent priority to decrease exposures," said Philippe Grandjean, a researcher at the Harvard School of Public Health who believes the 100 ppt safe-exposure level EPA is proposing is still 100 times too high.

Vermont health officials, for example, have set that state's PFOA level at 20 ppt, based on the same research the EPA is relying on.

Class-action lawsuits have been filed as far back as 2001 against companies such as 3M and DuPont over PFOA contamination of water near factories or disposal sites in a host of communities, including Decatur, Alabama, and Cottage Grove, Minnesota.

In settling a lawsuit involving 70,000 people in West Virginia and Ohio, DuPont agreed in 2004 to install filters to remove PFOA from water systems in six communities surrounding its Parkersburg, West Virginia plant. In October, DuPont was found liable for a woman's kidney cancer in the first of 3,500 lawsuits filed by people with diseases they blame on the contamination.

The American Water Works Association, a water industry group, believes that nationwide regulation of PFOA isn't needed but that testing for the substance at manufacturing sites would be prudent, spokesman Greg Kail said.

Advanced filtration systems to remove PFOA can cost millions of dollars up front, plus tens of thousands a year in operating costs.

3M invented the chemical 1947, and it became so ubiquitous that more than 98 percent of Americans have traces in their blood, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 3M began to phase it out in 2002 in response to health concerns raised by the EPA. DuPont and eight other companies later agreed to do the same by 2015.

Studies funded by the DuPont settlement concluded PFOA is a "probable cause" of six illnesses, including thyroid disease and kidney and testicular cancer. Those studies were based on people who drank water with PFOA at a level of 50 ppt for a year - half what the EPA is expected to set as the safe level. Other studies have linked PFOA to low birthweight and other problems in children.

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo warned that PFOA and other chemicals will probably be discovered in the water across the state and country.

"We allowed waste disposal in fashions that, in retrospect, were not prudent," he said, "and now, in many ways, we are paying the price as a society."

Recent storms put California drought emergency in question

Posted: Mar 15, 2016 4:23 PM PDT Tuesday, March 15, 2016 7:23 PM EDT*Updated: Mar 15, 2016 4:23 PM PDT* Tuesday, March 15, 2016 7:23 PM EDT

FRESNO, Calif. (AP) - Some water districts say California's wet winter calls into question the need for residents to live under an extended drought emergency.

Robert Roscoe of the Sacramento Suburban Water District said Tuesday that regulators should reserve the drought restrictions for true emergencies, like last year. That's when Gov. Jerry Brown ordered residents to cut water use 25 percent, similar to a mandate extended to late 2016.

Roscoe says residents responded well to the order.

He worries, however, that they'll see brimming Northern California reservoirs and a deep snowpack and grow weary of conservation efforts.

State Water Board Chair Felicia Marcus says the board will soon consider relaxing or dropping the drought regulations.

Marcus says she first wants to see rain and snowfall totals through March before making any changes.

Truckee has water for fishing season

By Colin Lygren |
Posted: Tue 2:07 PM, Mar 15, 2016

RENO, Nev. (KOLO) -- It appears for the first time in years the Truckee River will have normal flows through most of the summer. That will be a stark difference from what we saw happening with the river in the summer of 2015.

"At times we had less than 10 CFS in the river. I think one time I looked at it was less than five. We are not going to see that this year and that is really good news," said Chris Healy with the Nevada Department of Wildlife.

The return of winter, and with it the return of water, means scenes like we saw last summer, fish struggling to stay alive, will not happen this year.

"We have not had a lot of water in the last three years. This year we have it, and we are really looking forward to seeing how the river responds," said Healy.

"We're going to probably have a great summer," said Jim Litchfield with the Reno Fly Shop.

Litchfield says anglers are already gearing up in preparation for fishing the river this season.

"People are going to get back in the fishing rhythm and the Truckee River, the Little Truckee River and all of our area reservoirs are going to be flowing great this year," said Litchfield.

There is more good news: trophy size trout that were threatened by the drought appear to have made it out alive.

“We still had a significant number of large fish available that will spawn and bring back the natural populations," said Healy.

It's not to say the fishing conditions will be perfect, but they'll likely be better than they have been on the Truckee in years

Carson City water revenues 10 percent below projections

Carson City next year may consider raising water rates again if a drop in water consumption continues to slash revenues.

Revenues from rates for fiscal year 2015-2016 are coming in 10 percent or $1.4 million below projections, due in part to voluntary conservation during the drought.

If the trend continues, the city would have to significantly pare back spending on water infrastructure capital improvement projects, David Bruketta, Carson City utility manager, told the Utility Financial Oversight Committee Tuesday.

“In six years, that would mean $8.4 million less revenue,” he said.

The department’s capital improvement plan for 2016-2017 is $3.6 million and includes work on the transmission main, well re-drilling and pump replacements.

Bruketta said he hoped the current wet winter would reverse the tide, encouraging people to consume again, and suggested the city wait another year to see if it needed to reevaluate rates.

“You’re selling a commodity and you’ve asked people to buy less of that commodity. So if you’re relying on a rate by gallon, we have to do something about how we’re charging,” Committee Member Mike Bennett said. “I don’t think a year makes a trend, but this is really scary in my opinion.”

Darren Schulz, public works director, said the situation isn’t dire and rates are going up faster than people are cutting back.

“It is better than years ago, it’s just that the margin isn’t as much as we predicted,” Schulz said. “It’s not causing problems that are keeping us up at night.”

The coming fiscal year is the fourth year in a five-year phase-in of new water rates approved by the city supervisors in 2013 to fund infrastructure improvements.

The rates now comprise a flat rate and a volume rate for water consumed above the amount covered by the base rate with the goal of providing stable rates to budget around.

But the ongoing drought, and possibly the jump in rates, incentivize residents to conserve, cutting revenues.

The utility department also explained why the drop in revenues meant it could not meet certain financial policy goals set out by the city.

The financial policies were laid out in 2013 to stabilize reserve funds, but they’re not binding.

The committee was created at the same time to make recommendations to the Board of Supervisors regarding compliance with the policies. The committee voted to reco

BEYOND FLINT: TESTS FOR CITIES, RURAL SUBDIVISIONS AND EVEN SCHOOLS AND DAY CARES SERVING WATER TO 6 MILLION PEOPLE HAVE FOUND EXCESSIVE AND HARMFUL LEVELS OF LEAD.

Alison Young and

Mark Nichols, USA TODAY

While a harsh national spotlight focuses on the drinking water crisis in Flint, Mich., a USA TODAY NETWORK investigation has identified almost 2,000 additional water systems spanning all 50 states where testing has shown excessive levels of lead contamination over the past four years.

The water systems, which reported lead levels exceeding Environmental Protection Agency standards, collectively supply water to 6 million people. About 350 of those systems provide drinking water to schools or day cares. The USA TODAY NETWORK investigation also found at least 180 of the water systems failed to notify consumers about the high lead levels as federal rules require.

Melissa Hoffman, 40 expresses her concerns about the high lead levels found at her children's school, Caroline Elementary School during a town hall meeting in Ithaca, N.Y., earlier this month.
(Photo: Romain Blanquart, Detroit Free Press)

Many of the highest reported lead levels were found at schools and day cares. A water sample at a Maine elementary school was 42 times higher than the EPA limit of 15 parts per billion, while a Pennsylvania preschool was 14 times higher, records show. At an elementary school in Ithaca, N.Y., one sample tested this year at a stunning 5,000 ppb of lead, the EPA’s threshold for “hazardous waste.”

"This is most definitely a problem that needs emergent care," Melissa Hoffman, a parent in Ithaca, forcefully pleaded with officials at a public hearing packed with upset parents demanding answers.

In all, the USA TODAY NETWORK analysis of EPA enforcement data identified 600 water systems in which tests at some taps showed lead levels topping 40 parts per billion (ppb), which is more than double the EPA's action level limit. While experts caution Flint is an extreme case of pervasive contamination, those lead levels rival the 400-plus of the worst samples in far more extensive testing of around 15,000 taps across Flint. The 40 ppb mark also stands as a threshold that the EPA once labeled on its website an “imminent” health threat for pregnant women and young children.

Across the country almost two thousand drinking water systems have failed lead testing since 2012. A USA TODAY Network investigation found harmful levels of lead in homes, schools, and other public buildings.*USA TODAY NETWORK*

Fractured system, limited testing

Even at small doses, lead poses a health threat, especially for pregnant women and young children. Lead can damage growing brains and cause reduced IQs, attention disorders and other problem behaviors. Infants fed formula made with contaminated tap water face significant risk. Adults are not immune, with evidence linking lead exposure to kidney problems, high blood pressure and increased risks of cardiovascular deaths. The EPA stresses there is no safe level of lead exposure.

Most Americans get their drinking water from a fragmented network of about 155,000 different water systems serving everything from big cities to individual businesses and school buildings. The EPA determines that a system has exceeded the lead standard when more than 10% of samples taken show lead levels above 15 parts per billion. It's called an "action level" because, at that level, water systems are required to take

action to reduce contamination. But enforcement, which is implemented state by state, can be inconsistent and spotty. Some 373 systems have failed repeatedly, with tests continuing to find excessive lead in tests months or even years later, the EPA data shows. What's more, the systems have widely varying levels of financial resources and staff training.

Amid cotton fields in Lamesa, Texas, for example, tests last year showed lead contamination more than seven times the EPA limit at Klondike Independent School District, which serves 260 students in a single K-12 building. "Some things just slip by," said the school superintendent Steve McLaren when pressed about skipping a round of testing in 2014. In a tiny school system, McLaren said leaders "wear a lot of hats." At times he's served as principal and bus driver, in addition to being superintendent and in charge of the drinking water system. The school replaced drinking fountains, and plans to replace its entire water system next fall. McLaren said he's concerned about how high lead levels might affect students and understands the need for action. But he said, "Our kids are strapping and healthy, and they've been drinking this water all their lives."

The testing required by the government can include samples from as few as five or 10 taps in a year, or even over multiple years. The system is designed only to give an indication of whether homes or buildings with lead pipes and plumbing may be at higher risk of lead leaching into water. Even the biggest water systems in cities are required to test just 50 to 100 taps.

The limited and inconsistent testing means the full scope of the lead contamination problem could be even more widespread. People in thousands more communities served by water systems that have been deemed in compliance with the EPA's lead rules have no assurance their drinking water is safe from the brain-damaging toxin.

“You would hope that the cities and the counties and the state and the federal government would be holding people’s feet to the fire when it comes to providing quality water to the consumer if there is an issue.”

TERRY HECKMAN, A BOARD MEMBER AT THE ARIZONA WATER QUALITY ASSOCIATION

“This is just a case where we have a rule that’s not been adequately protective,” said Lynn Goldman, a former EPA official and dean of George Washington University’s school of public health. "The entire design of the regulation doesn't tell you about your own water."

Drinking water typically isn’t contaminated with lead when it leaves the treatment plant. It becomes contaminated as it travels through lead service lines on individual properties and lead plumbing fixtures inside homes. At best, the EPA's rules and testing are a sentinel system, alerting officials of the need to treat their water with anti-corrosion chemicals. Doing so reduces, but does not eliminate, the lead in water reaching the tap.

There are about 75 million homes across the country built before 1980, meaning they’re most likely to contain some lead plumbing. That's more than half of the country’s housing units, according to the Census Bureau. The heaviest concentrations are in New York, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Pennsylvania.

“You would hope that the cities and the counties and the state and the federal government would be holding people’s feet to the fire when it comes to providing quality water to the consumer if there is an issue,” said Terry Heckman, a board member at the Arizona Water Quality Association, a group that represents water systems. “That’s what the government is supposed to do, is look over the general welfare of the populace.”

USA TODAY

How much lead in water poses an imminent threat?

Flint's risk factors not rare

Experts say what happened in Flint is an extreme case and helps show how the limited testing required by the EPA provides only a crude indicator of systems where harmful levels of lead may be in water at homes with lead pipes.

The struggling city of about 100,000 people passed the government's required lead tests. But one resident's vocal complaints spurred extra tests at her home, revealing shocking levels of lead contamination: 104 to 13,200 ppb. The crisis worsened as independent researchers tested 300 samples across the city, revealing homes with high lead levels that the government-mandated tests missed. More than 10% contained at least 27 ppb of lead. Since then, regulators conducted another 15,000 tests. More than 1,000 samples show lead above the 15 ppb limit, and more than 400 show dangerous levels above 40 ppb.

One unique factor in Flint: the water department changed to a corrosive river water source, then failed to treat it with anti-corrosion chemicals. The result: a pervasive contamination problem as the insides of old lead pipes broke down and released a torrent of poison.

Yet the fundamental risk factor in Flint – old lead service lines that deliver water to homes, plus interior plumbing containing lead – is a common problem for tens of millions of homes mostly built before 1986. Unlike other contaminants that can be filtered out at the water plant, lead usually gets into drinking water at the end of the system, as it comes onto individual properties and into homes.

At greatest risk, experts say, are an estimated 7.3 million homes connected to their utility's water mains by individual lead service lines -- the pipe carrying water from the main under the street onto your property and into your home. The water passes through what amounts to "a pure lead straw," said Marc Edwards,

a Virginia Tech environmental engineering professor who has studied water contamination in Flint and a similar, earlier crisis in Washington, D.C.

Lead service lines were mostly installed before the 1930s, although some communities continued to lay lead pipes for decades longer.

The way tap water becomes contaminated — at or even inside individual homes — poses a vexing problem for regulators, utilities and consumers. A home with a lead service line and older internal plumbing may have high levels of lead in its tap water. But a nearby, newly constructed home may have no lead contamination. The only way to know if your house is at risk is to find out about its water line and plumbing.

“People are legitimately concerned about what they’re hearing in the wake of Flint,” said Lynn Thorp, of the advocacy group Clean Water Action, who recently served on a federal work-group on lead in drinking water. “As long as we have lead in contact with drinking water, we can have exposure at the tap.”

Thorp said consumers need to become educated about any risks at their individual homes

LEAD IN THE WATER: A NATIONWIDE LOOK

Since 2012, nearly 2,000 water systems across the U.S. have found elevated lead levels in tap water samples, a public health concern that requires them to notify customers and take action. Search or click the map to find systems in your area. The map table shows the state / name of the water system; the county it serves; the range of lead levels over 15 parts per billion in samples that triggered an action status, and total action-level tests over the period.

United States

Texas	15.5ppb-600ppb	**183**
Pennsylvania	15.5ppb-1,273ppb	**157**
New York	15.5ppb-2,300ppb	**129**
California	15.8ppb-15,000ppb	**114**
New Jersey	15.5ppb-600ppb	**111**
Wisconsin	15.5ppb-12,465ppb	**96**
Maine	16ppb-635ppb	**94**
Georgia	15.5ppb-263.8ppb	**81**
Florida	15.5ppb-340ppb	**80**
North Carolina	16ppb-240ppb	**79**
Connecticut	16ppb-650ppb	**77**
Massachusetts	15.5ppb-490ppb	**74**
Vermont	16ppb-476ppb	**74**
Illinois	15.5ppb-127ppb	**66**
Virginia	16ppb-4,100ppb	**65**
Colorado	16ppb-117ppb	**63**
Ohio	16.1ppb-162ppb	**61**
Oregon	15.9ppb -158ppb	**59**

Alaska	15.5ppb-715ppb	**57**
Oklahoma	15.5ppb-1,190ppb	**57**
New Hampshire	16ppb-1,660ppb	**55**
Maryland	15.7ppb-339ppb	**52**
Idaho	15.5ppb-990ppb	**50**
Indiana	16.1ppb-170ppb	**49**
Michigan	16ppb-4,700ppb	**42**
Washington	16ppb-270ppb	**40**
Arizona	17ppb-109ppb	**34**
Missouri	15.6ppb-700ppb	**34**
Iowa	16ppb-176ppb	**30**
Mississippi	15.7ppb-2,413ppb	**27**
Rhode Island	16ppb-97ppb	**27**
Kansas	15.6ppb-647.2ppb	**26**
Wyoming	16ppb-215ppb	**25**
Delaware	15.9ppb-67.4ppb	**24**
Louisiana	17ppb-48ppb	**23**
Minnesota	16ppb-294ppb	**23**
New Mexico	15.9ppb-280ppb	**21**
South Carolina	15.5ppb-460ppb	**19**
West Virginia	15.8ppb-489ppb	**19**
Montana	16ppb-494ppb	**18**
Nebraska	15.9ppb-79.32ppb	**15**
Arkansas	17ppb-48ppb	**13**
Tennessee	16ppb-42ppb	**12**

Utah	15.9ppb-100ppb	**11**
North Dakota	15.8ppb-101ppb	**8**
Nevada	17ppb-280ppb	**6**
Alabama	18.3ppb-95ppb	**4**
Hawaii	21.6ppb-21.6ppb	**1**
Kentucky	16ppb-16ppb	**1**
South Dakota	33ppb-33ppb	**1**

SOURCE: USA TODAY analysis of EPA’s Safe Drinking Water Information System (SDWIS) database

What is government doing?

Under the EPA's Lead and Copper Rule, implemented in 1991, the government's approach for protecting people from lead in drinking water has relied heavily on water systems monitoring for indications that their water has become more corrosive. The more corrosive the water, the more lead will be drawn out of pipes. Treatment of water with anti-corrosion chemicals can only reduce, not eliminate, lead from leaching into tap water in invisible and tasteless doses.

That’s why the EPA's National Drinking Water Advisory Council wrote agency leaders in December calling for removing lead service lines "to the greatest degree possible." It's a daunting recommendation since in most cases, the water utility owns part of the line and the rest belongs to the homeowner. A credit ratings firm warned this month that replacing lead service lines could cost tens of billions of dollars.

"We're now dealing with a legacy issue on private property distributed throughout many communities," said Tracy Mehan, the American Water Works Association's executive director of government affairs. The cost to replace each service line can range from hundreds to thousands of dollars.

Meanwhile, the EPA advisory council, whose members include experts from water utilities and state agencies, recommended that EPA take numerous steps to strengthen the existing regulation. They include developing a "household action level" that would trigger public health actions when lead contamination reaches certain levels and ensuring the public receives more information about the risks they face.

In addition, state water regulators say, federal officials need to tell water utilities what level of lead contamination indicates an acute health risk that should trigger a "do not drink" alert to all of the systems' customers. The EPA is evaluating the recommendations and expects to propose revisions to its lead contamination regulations in 2017.

"We really recognize there's a need to strengthen the rule," Joel Beauvais, deputy assistant administrator for EPA's Office of Water, said in an interview.

While he characterized Flint as an outlier, he said, "There's no question we have challenges with lead in drinking water across the country. Millions of lead service lines in thousands of systems."

Changing the rules could take at least a year. Beauvais said the EPA is working now to make sure states fully enforce existing rules. The agency last month sent letters to governors and state regulators calling for greater attention to drinking water oversight. While federal rules are made by the EPA, they're enforced by the states.

Because of Flint, some utilities and state water regulators said they were already taking a closer look at water systems where testing identified excessive lead.

"It has caused a sort of shock wave through the drinking water industry generally," said Jim Taft, executive director of the Association of State Drinking Water Administrators. States are looking at water systems' performance and oversight, he said, "to make sure we're not missing something.

High lead in systems large, small

Christi Woodruff of Corinna, Maine, doesn't know whether her trailer's water has lead problems but says she's drinking bottled water anyway because of a notice delivered several weeks ago to residents of her trailer park.
(Photo: Andrew West, USA TODAY NETWORK)

At a trailer home at the Maple Ridge Mobile Home Park in Corinna, Maine, Christi Woodruff recalls the notice hung on her door last year alerting her to potential lead contamination in the neighborhood.

A mom with an 8-year-old daughter, Woodruff initially planned to get her water tested. But, she shrugged it off after the park's landlord told her testing was unnecessary. "The manager said not to worry because it was only certain trailers ... He didn't think my trailer was one of them," she said.

Property manager Randy Dixon blamed tap water from a single old trailer with lead-soldered copper pipes for causing the park's water to fail the EPA's testing. He then told a USA TODAY NETWORK reporter to stop interviewing residents.

The analysis of EPA's data show the Maine park is among 1,918 water systems flagged for having an "action level exceedance" for lead during 2012 through 2015. That generally means more than 10% of tap water samples taken during a testing period showed lead contamination above 15 ppb.

If you're living in a home with a lead service line and received a notice about possible lead contamination, "it's a good idea to get your water tested," said Beauvais, the EPA water office official.

Most of the water systems that failed the EPA's lead standard serve anywhere from a few hundred to several thousand people each, often running their lines to homes in rural communities, or managing water for individual schools or businesses in remote areas.

In Lake Mills, Wisc., about 50 miles west of Milwaukee, EPA records show the utility serving water to 5,300 people failed lead tests in 2013, 2014 and again in 2015 with some readings several times the federal limit.

Paul Hermanson, director of Public Works, said Lake Mills sent fliers with water bills since 2010 urging residents in older homes to run their water 15 to 30 seconds before using it. The idea behind not using the first water out of the tap is to avoid drinking water that's been touching the old pipes and has the greatest risk of containing lead. “I don’t know that there’s a good solution to it other than running the water,” he said.

Some of the older homes in the growing bedroom community of Firestone, Colo., about 30 miles north of Denver, tested for excessive lead four times since 2014, records show. Town officials said they have repeatedly notified their 9,500 water customers of potentially harmful lead levels and distributed information explaining how to reduce risk. “The fact that they haven’t fixed this, that’s annoying,” said resident Heath Gaston.

The USA TODAY NETWORK analysis showed three of every four water systems that exceeded the lead standard from 2012 to 2015 served 500 people or less. They often lack the resources and staff expertise of larger systems. "Some of these small systems don't even have a full-time operator," said Taft, of the state water regulators association. They may rely on one person, responsible for several systems, he said. In the case of schools, the same staff that does building maintenance may be managing the water system.

But nearly 70 of the systems with excessive lead findings during the past four years each provide water to at least 10,000 people. They include:

Passaic Valley Water Commission, New Jersey: More than 315,000 people are served by the water system in the industrialized area of northern New Jersey with a history of other pollution crises. It failed to meet EPA's lead standards during two testing periods last year and one in 2012. Commission officials said a $135 million construction project is underway to improve corrosion control. The utility officials also are publicly encouraging more people to participate in its lead-testing program.

New Bedford, Mass.: This municipal water system, which serves about 95,000 in a seaport city about an hour south of Boston, has been cited for excessive lead in 2014 and early 2015, EPA data show. Ron Labelle, the city's public infrastructure commissioner, said the area's housing is among the oldest in the Northeast and some still have lead service lines. A consultant has helped improve the system's anti-corrosion treatments, he said, and the city passed its most recent testing in December. Additional testing will be done this spring.

Bangor Water District, Maine: More than 28,000 people receive water from this system, which exceeded EPA's lead standards three times in 2012 and 2013. Operators tweaked chemicals used in its corrosion control program, and have been in compliance since

Failure to notify people

When testing does reveal high lead levels, the USA TODAY NETWORK found many people were not warned as required. Of the 180 cited for failing to notify the public, almost half were cited more than once, records show.

In Ohio, in the past year, seven water systems serving a combined 8,800 customers failed to notify residents of potential lead contamination within 60 days as required.

Tests found excessive lead last summer at homes in the village of Sebring. The water system didn't alert customers until January, after Flint started making national headlines. The Ohio EPA placed two employees on leave while investigating. State records show six other Ohio water systems also did not provide timely warnings to residents after failing lead tests. The systems supply water to mobile home parks, a subdivision, an arboretum and a church and its day care.

In Arizona, several water systems that found unsafe amounts of lead in drinking water samples taken several years ago failed to act until February, after the USA TODAY NETWORK began requesting data about lead levels in drinking water.

The principal at a boarding school near the Navajo Reservation was unaware until February that water from a faucet in a church at the property tested high for lead in 2013. Operators of a small water utility near the Mexico border and a small community system in eastern Arizona both had high lead test results in 2013. One said he didn't know any action was needed. The other conceded the lack of action was an oversight.

Misael Cabrera, director Arizona Department of Environmental Quality, acknowledged lapses in following up with some water systems. Cabrera said he's since asked all water providers for high lead levels to notify their customers. His department also is creating a system to better track compliance.

Without action, issues fester

Without strong action by regulators, problems can fester, especially in small systems with limited resources.

In southeastern Oklahoma's Latimer County, a rural water system serving about 1,500 people has had excessive lead levels during seven testing

Willie Williams, plant operator for the Sardis Lake Water Authority in Clayton, Okla., said water that comes from his plant has no detectable lead.
(Photo: Shane Bevel, USA TODAY)

periods since 2013, EPA data show. The Latimer County Rural Water District #2 failed more tests in the past three years than any water system in the country.

Little has been done to fix the problem. The Latimer #2 district points its finger at its water supplier, and the supplier blames homeowners for not replacing bad plumbing.

“There’s nothing we can do,” said Linda Petty, office manager for the Latimer #2 district, which doesn’t treat its own water. Latimer buys its water from the nearby Sardis Lake Water Authority. “We’re at their mercy,” she said.

“The water that we have coming out of the lake does not have lead in it,” said Willie Williams, the Sardis Lake system’s operator. “They have some houses in their system that have horrendous plumbing. There’s not a single thing Latimer #2 can do about it and not a single thing I can do about it.”

Customers received notices of the lead issue in their bills, the water system and residents said. County officials say they have not gotten calls from concerned residents.

“I haven’t heard anybody saying anything about it,” said John Medders, a county commissioner whose home is on the system. He recalled getting a notice in the fall. “Most of the time I just throw mine in the trash. I don’t pay much mind to it.”

Water regulators at the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality said they now plan to meet with both water systems and send state engineers to Latimer and 18 other water systems that don't comply with lead-contamination limits.

"The Flint, Michigan, situation has really opened our eyes to what's going on," said Patty Thompson, engineering manager for the department's public water supply group.

Contributing: Mark Alesia, The Indianapolis Star; Jessie Balmert, The (Newark, Ohio) Advocate; Patricia Borns, The (Fort Myers, Fla.) News-Press; Trevor Hughes, USA TODAY; Eric Litke, USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin; Jacy Marmaduke, Fort Collins Coloradoan; Caitlin McGlade, The Arizona Republic; Marty Schladen, The El Paso Times; Todd Spangler, Detroit Free Press; Laura Ungar, USA TODAY; Jim Waymer, Florida Todav: and Russell Zimmer, Asbury Park (N.J.) Press.

Follow Alison Young and Mark Nichols on Twitter: @alisonannyoung and @nicholsmarkc

Broken water main floods Ashley Furniture in Reno

By Samantha Chadwell Thursday, March 17th 2016

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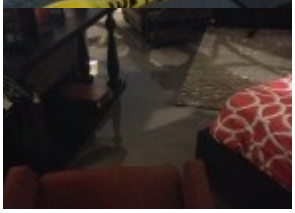
- 

RENO, Nev., (MyNews4.com & KRNV) — *UPDATE: 12:47 p.m.*

An Ashley Furniture Store employee tells News 4 that their warehouse located at 551 Coney Island Drive in Sparks is open for customers to pickup any pre-ordered furniture.

The employee says the main store on Moana Lane will remain closed indefinitely after a water main broke early Thursday morning and caused an unknown amount of damage to the store and furniture inside the store.

UPDATE: 8 a.m.

Water is still on the southbound on-ramp at Moana Lane on I-580 after a broken water main caused flooding and extensive damage to the structure and contents of Ashley Furniture in Reno, according to Reno Fire Battalion Chief John McNamara.

Early Thursday morning, at around 3:53 a.m.m a delivery truck driver arrived at Ashley Furniture, found water coming out of the northeast corner of the building and alerted the authorities.

When Reno Fire arrived, they determined the flooding was caused by a type of water run-off that required Truckee Meadows Water Authority, who arrived shortly after. TMWA was able to locate the water valve and shut it off.

Reno Fire officials said at least 75 percent of the ground floor at Ashley's Furniture was hit with water, and although flooding entered a nearby roadway, no other buildings in the shopping center were damaged.

Reno Fire officials told News 4 the cause of the flooding will not be determined until property owners conduct investigation. Belfor crews are on hand now pumping water out from the ground floor.

A water main has broken at the Ashley Furniture Homestore on East Moana Lane in Reno has partially flooded.

The water main is a part of a loop system so shutting off the valve will just cause a bigger leak.

One valve has been shut off at this time and crews are looking for another valve to shut off. The owners of the store have been reached.

A cause for the water main break has not been determined at this time.

We have a photographer on the scene getting more information and we will keep you updated on this story as soon as we get more information.

Stay with News 4 for the latest updates on this situation.

FLINT'S WATER CRISIS BEGAN WITH A FLIP OF THE SWITCH

FLINT, Mich. -- The Flint water crisis started with a flip of a switch -- quite literally.

The beginnings of the lead problem can be traced to shortly after April 25, 2014, when former Flint Mayor Dayne Walling flipped a switch -- moving the city's water supply from Detroit to its own system, where the main water source was the Flint River.

Water supply switch being flipped in April of 2014.

CBS NEWS

"Not a day or night goes by that this tragedy doesn't weigh on my mind," Michigan Governor Rick Snyder told members of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform on Thursday.

Play **VIDEO**

Michigan governor grilled on Capitol Hill over Flint water

Now, two years later, Snyder and EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy are both feeling the heat for the toxic lead poising that infiltrated not only Flint's water system, but possibly most importantly, the children living in the city.

"People realized that children were getting lead poisoned and potentially contracting these water-borne diseases because the law was not being followed," said Virginia Tech professor Marc Edwards, who uncovered that the water was creating a public health threat.

Play **VIDEO**

Report finds lead contamination threat beyond Flint

Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha first warned city officials in Flint to stop using the Flint River for water in September 2015. It wasn't until October 16, 2016, that the city officially switched back to using Detroit's water.

"Lead should never touch a child," said Dr. Hanna-Attisha, a pediatrician in Flint. "So if it's detected in a child, it's almost too late."

And the switch back may have been too late for some children, who had already been exposed to lead.

"You see the results at five years of age, when they need early intervention services and special education. You see the impact at 10-years, when they're having ADHD-like symptoms," Dr. Hanna-Attisha said. "And you'll see the impact when they're like 15-years-old, and they're having trouble with the criminal justice system."

Sunday watering ban could save 900 million gallons a summer

Steve Marcus

Sprinklers water a lawn at a home near Rancho Drive and Oakey Boulevard on Thursday, Aug. 29, 2013.

By *Jackie Valley* (contact)

Published Thursday, March 17, 2016 | 1:29 p.m.

Updated Thursday, March 17, 2016 | 3:48 p.m.

Lawns in Southern Nevada will have to do without water — unless clouds unleash rain — one day a week during the summer.

The Southern Nevada Water Authority's board of directors voted today to ban sprinkler use on Sundays from May 1 through Aug. 31. The restriction limits summer landscape watering to six days a week.

The Sunday watering restriction will be voluntary, albeit strongly encouraged, this summer before likely becoming mandatory next year. Individual jurisdictions — Clark County, Las Vegas, Henderson, North Las Vegas and Boulder City — need to adopt the change into their ordinances before it can be enforceable.

The water agency sought the restriction as part of ongoing conservation efforts.

Watering lawns six days a week instead of seven during the hot summer months won't cause permanent landscape damage or diminish the appearance of lawns, John Entsminger, general manager of the water authority, told the board.

Residents who already skip a watering day tend to do so on Sundays, hence its selection as the summer water-saving day going forward, he said.

"You always want to be letting the community know what's coming down the pipe while giving them time to adjust," Entsminger said.

Summer water restrictions already prohibit sprinkler irrigation from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. to avoid evaporation during the hottest hours of the day. The new restriction stands to save 50 million gallons of water each Sunday and 900 million gallons over the course of the summer, officials said.

Regional water sales are expected to decrease by $1.3 million as a result of the change, water authority spokesman Bronson Mack said.

Board member Bob Coffin expressed concern about how such a ban might affect vegetable and flower gardens that require daily watering.

Entsminger said the Sunday ban addresses "spray irrigation" for turf, meaning hand watering or using a drip-irrigation system for gardens would be acceptable.

The water agency will monitor the change this year and share results with the board next year before it becomes mandatory.

Seasonal watering restrictions aren't anything new to Southern Nevada. The region has restrictions that limit landscape watering to three assigned days per week during the fall and spring. The restriction is even tighter in the winter, with one assigned day per week for landscape irrigation.

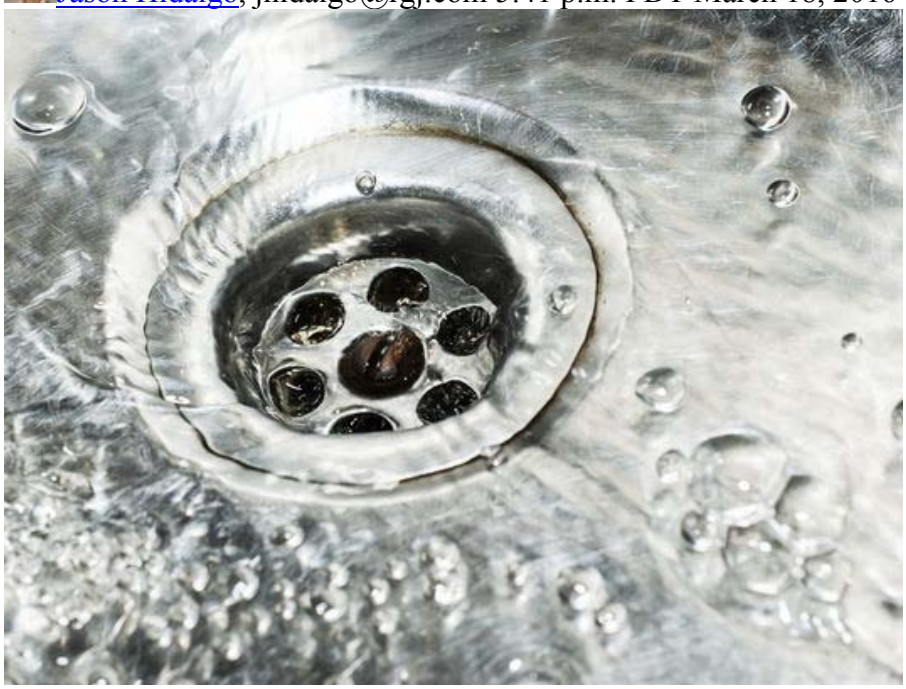
The addition of a summer watering restriction comes at a time when all eyes are on Lake Mead, the region's primary water source. The lake's elevation has been steadily dropping because of the drought and is approaching the level that triggers a water cut.

Lake Mead's current water level is 1,083 feet above sea level, officials said. When the reservoir's elevation falls to 1,075 feet and remains there through Jan. 1, the region's yearly allotment of water from the Colorado River will be cut by roughly 4.3 percent.

Lake Mead's water level could dip below 1,075 feet this summer, but it's expected to increase before the end of the year. Water authorities, however, predict the water level will fall again and remain below that threshold through the end of next year, triggering a water shortage declaration in 2018.

23 public water systems in NV non-compliant, including 3 for lead


Jason Hidalgo, jhidalgo@rgj.com 5:41 p.m. PDT March 18, 2016



State data shows that 23 of Nevada's public water systems exceed action levels for contaminants based on EPA drinking water standards.(Photo: Getty/iStockphoto)

A Reno Gazette-Journal investigation in conjunction with USA Today Network found that 23 public water systems in Nevada are not compliant with safety standards for contaminants.

Data obtained from the Nevada Department of Environmental Protection through a public records request showed that several small public water systems exceeded levels set by the Environmental Protection Agency for contaminants, which include lead, arsenic, uranium and coliform bacteria. NDEP oversees about 580 water systems across the state.

"Staff is in regular communication with non-compliant public water systems as they work toward achieving compliance," said JoAnn Kittrell, public information manager of the Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. "(The Bureau of Safe Drinking Water) is aware that notification is being provided to the customers of the non-compliant public water systems."

The list includes three public water systems exceeding the EPA's "action level" for lead of 15 parts per billion, which triggers a followup investigation and action.

The Marigold Mine Potable Water System in Humboldt County posted the highest levels of lead in the state at 50 parts per billion based on a sampling done in 2015.

The other public water systems that exceeded lead action levels are Goodsprings School in Clark County and Fort Churchill Power Plant in Lyon County, which both posted lead levels of 16 parts per billion. Sample sites at the elementary school itself were below the action level for lead but a drinking fountain at the community center exceeded the standard and has since been turned off. All three sites are providing bottled water.

"We have seen very few instances of lead exceedances and those have been limited to small systems," Kittrell said. "Only three small water systems are currently exceeding the action level for lead, with all three systems taking required steps to return to compliance."

No Washoe County sites exceeded lead levels for water safety. The highest levels of lead in the county were seen in Natchez Gym at 11 parts per billion followed by Mount Rose Bowl Homeowners Association at 10 parts per billion.

Washoe water systems

The Mount Rose Bowl Homeowners Association, however, exceeded the action level for copper, and is one of three Washoe County sites that were found non-compliant for key drinking water standards. Copper level in drinking water at the public water system was 4.35 milligrams per liter, which is significantly higher than the action level of 1.3 milligrams per liter.

Two other public water systems in Washoe County were deemed non-compliant for primary drinking water standards. The Silver Knolls Mutual Water Company is one of 10 systems in the state that exceeded action levels for arsenic. Levels of arsenic in drinking water at the location were recorded at 11 parts per billion compared to the action level of 10 parts per billion.

Rosemount Water Company in Washoe, meanwhile, was the lone water system in the state to exceed action levels for uranium. Sampling at the site showed uranium levels of 69 micrograms per liter compared to the action level of 30 micrograms per liter.

For secondary drinking water standards, Washoe Lake State Park North Boat Ramp was found non-compliant for its iron and manganese levels. Unlike primary drinking water standards for contaminants such as lead and arsenic, secondary standard contaminants are not considered health-threatening and typically impact the appearance, smell or taste of the water, but it remains safe to drink.

The water systems that were found non-compliant mostly involved smaller ones that served populations ranging from 25 to 900 people. The Truckee Meadows Water Authority, which serves 385,000 residents in the greater Reno-Sparks area, was not cited for any non-compliance issues in the data obtained by the RGJ.

"The smaller systems are the ones that tend to struggle with regaining compliance because they typically have limited financial resources so we have to collectively figure out ways to help that community get back to compliance," said Jennifer Carr, NDEP deputy administrator. "Larger systems such as TMWA also have more personnel to tackle projects whereas some of our smaller water systems are operated by one person who might be doing another side job."

Getting the lead out

Unlike the situation with Flint, Mich., lead contamination is rare in Nevada, according to environmental and water system officials reached by the RGJ.

The state, for example, is not seeing naturally occurring lead in water sources that it samples, Carr said. Instead, most contamination comes from old piping and faucets, especially after water has stood still for an extended period. In some areas in Nevada, hard water can offer some protection because it coats the piping instead of stripping away layers as was the case with the problematic Flint water. The state of Nevada, however, does not maintain a database of lead service lines present across the state.

"The water systems are responsible for knowing the materials within their systems," Carr said. "So the information we have on water systems from that perspective is really related to information we get when (the water systems) do their lead sampling."

TMWA, which has a newer water system infrastructure than places such as Flint or Washington, D.C., says testing of the water it distributes shows noissues with lead.

"Our system does not have lead distribution lines so we're in really good shape," said Will Raymond, TMWA water operation supervisor. "What we really have no control over, however, is the plumbing after the meter."

Even as Carr stressed that the 23 non-compliant systems represent a small part of the water supply in the state — 99 percent of Nevadans receive drinking water in compliance with health-based standards — she agreed with Raymond that plumbing at the home or business can be a blind spot. In some cases, a faucet in an older house or an old drinking fountain in a business that was built to old standards can become a source for lead contamination, Carr said.

As part of the regular monitoring schedule, water systems such as TMWA identify "worst-case scenario" properties for testing at the tap. In most cases, these are old buildings that were built before key dates such as 1989, when Nevada banned solder that had a lead content higher than 0.2 percent, for example.

Concerned homeowners can check the piping under their crawlspaces or ask their plumber to check for them if they have any concerns. They can also have lab testing done on their water or even get a water testing kit from places such as Home Depot. The best time to test is in the morning, when water has been sitting in pipes overnight.

Conversely, simply letting the water run for a bit can significantly reduce the chance for exposure. This is especially important for people whose water might have exceeded the action level, for example, and are waiting for it to be fixed.

"Oftentimes, the best way to reduce lead exposure is just to let the water run in the morning or after you come back from vacation," Carr said. "You can see similar data from Flint where you see lead levels drop just by getting the sitting water out."

Nevada's 23 non-compliant water systems

LEAD

- Marigold Mine Potable Water System, Humboldt
- Goodsprings School, Clark
- Fort Churchill Power Plant, Lyon

COPPER

- Coeur Rochester Inc., Pershing
- Mount Rose Bowl Homeowners Association, **Washoe**

ARSENIC

- Alamo Sewer and Water GID, Lincoln
- Wilde's Manor, Churchill
- Frontier Village Mobile Home Park, Clark

- Desert Paradise Mobile Home Park, Clark
- McDermitt Water System, Humboldt
- Old River Water Company, Churchill
- Roark Estates Water Association, Clark
- Lamoille Valley Plaza, Elko
- Silver Knolls Mutual Water Company, **Washoe**
- Shoshone Estates Water Company, Nye

NITRATE

- Windmill Ridge, Lincoln

URANIUM

- Rosemount Water Company, **Washoe**

DISINFECTANT BYPRODUCT

- Hawthorne Army Depot, Mineral

TOTAL COLIFORM

- Ruby Hill Mine, Eureka
- Kings River Elementary School, Humboldt
- Deer Creek Springs, Clark
- Wilson Reservoir BLM Camp Ground, Elko

One View: City needs to live up to promises to Verdi

Adrian Argyris 5:44 p.m. PDT March 22, 2016

Adrian Argyris(Photo: Provided to the RGJ)

The City of Reno is making decisions that affect Verdi, and these decisions are destroying the area.

The Truckee River, I-80 freeway and the railroad tracks are being used as points of contiguity allowing Verdi land to be annexed into the city so higher density developments can be done. To call Verdi land contiguous to the city and subject to its density is a misnomer and is ludicrous. The mega planned-unit developments of 600-plus homes and the 890,000-square-foot warehouse approved by the city will change the area and resident lifestyles forever.

The most recently approved development of 273 homes is on Mortensen-Garson land that was part of a contentious court battle between Washoe County and the city over land-grabbing in the early 2000s. The case resulted in a “Settlement Agreement”. The Mortensen et al. Development Handbook was a product of this agreement and spells out the development standards, including water, for the annexed properties. The city adopted this handbook into its municipal code in 2014, agreeing to honor it. The handbook specifically names TMWA as the water purveyor to the land.

RENO GAZETTE JOURNAL

One View: Save Verdi water wells

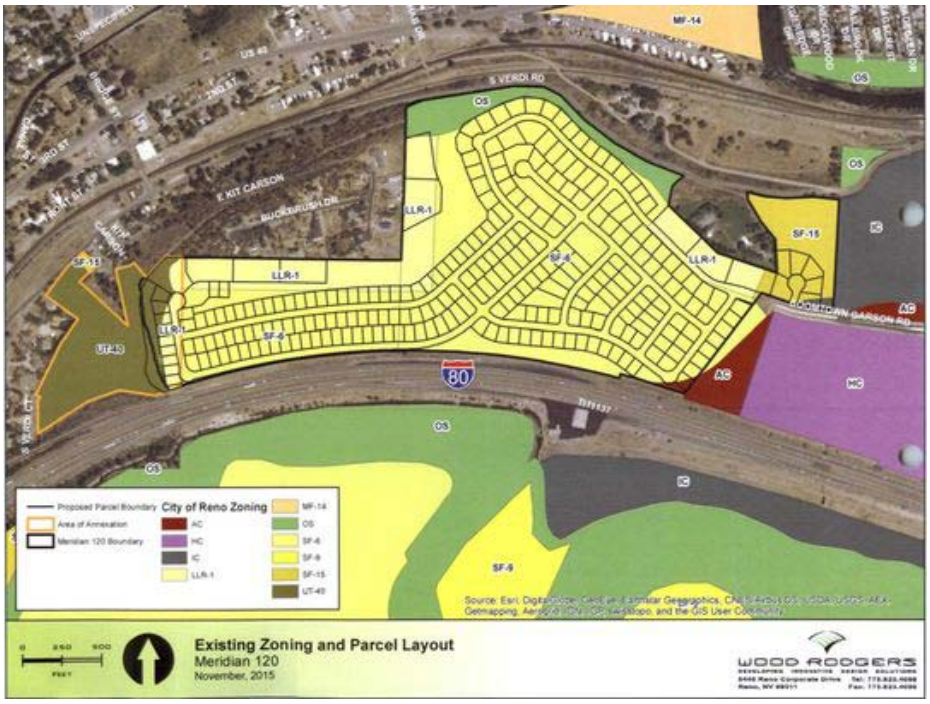
RENO GAZETTE JOURNAL

Council gives go ahead to Verdi housing development over neighborhood water concerns

Water was a major issue when the land was annexed in that the Verdi area relies on domestic wells. The drought has taken a toll. Wells are going dry and require re-drilling to deeper depths. The area’s basin, 091, Truckee Canyon Segment, is classified as being in an exceptional drought – the highest level of drought.

The Basin is overappropriated, meaning there are more water rights on paper than there is water in the ground. The water to the 273 homes will be provided by a quasi-municipal water system. The water will be continuously pumped and stored in 1.5 million-gallon tanks. The North Valleys and Galena Creek have proven these types of systems and domestic wells do not belong together – the domestics go dry. Yet the city approved the development knowing this.

There is a "sleeve" under the Truckee River for the connection to the existing TMWA water line but the developer does not want to pay the connection costs. The city ignored its commitment to Verdi and sided with the developer – essentially, kicking the costs to the domestic wells users in the form of dry wells.



A display map of the proposed Meridian 120 North housing development in Verdi. (Photo: Handout)

Verdi realizes growth is inevitable but it needs to "fit" in with the existing area and lifestyles. It needs to be sustainable. Growth in an area where residents have no say is unconscionable. The use of a quasi-municipal water system in an overappropriated basin that is in an exceptional drought and where domestic wells are relied upon is not sustainable. But, the City of Reno tossing aside its prior commitment to Verdi – the city's guarantee to have TMWA provide water to the annexed land – is unscrupulous and dishonorable.

The City of Reno needs to own up to its promises to Verdi. The city needs to honor its commitments to Verdi. The water to Meridian 120 North's development needs to be provided by TMWA.

Adrian Argyris is a 32-year resident of Verdi.

Experts: Water yard sparingly, don't use sprinklers yet

By Colin Lygren |
Posted: Wed 7:33 PM, Mar 23, 2016 |
Updated: Thu 11:03 AM, Mar 24, 2016

RENO, Nev. (KOLO) -- The sun is shining, the river is flowing and the flowers are blooming, so should we be watering?

"It depends first on where you live. Certain parts of our area are going to be dryer than others," said Heidi Kratsch, Horticulture Specialist with the University of Nevada Extension.

Kratsch suggests gardeners use their fingers to check soil moisture. If the soil is wet, plants should be okay. But if it is dry, it is time to water.

"Make sure that moisture gets down anywhere from 8-12 inches, just to make sure that tree or shrub isn't going to die," said Kratsch.

Using sprinklers is not the preferred method of watering right now. Experts say keep the sprinklers off because the region may still have a deep freeze before summer.

"One of the things that we really like are these soaker hoses," said Pawl Hollis at Rail City Garden Center. "The roots are growing. So right now they want to get to work and moisture is the limiting factor for them."

That's the case for trees and shrubs, but not lawns.

"I don't want to say it is a waste of water, but it is," said Andy Gebhardt, Director of Customer Relations with the Truckee Meadows Water Authority.

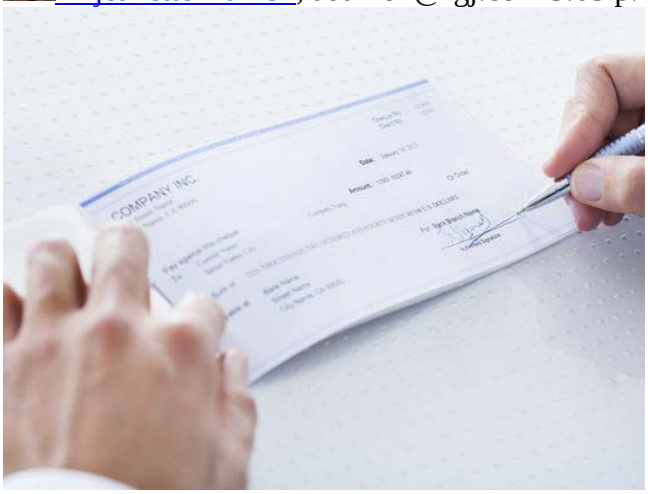
Gebhardt says lawns can survive right now without water and the ground is still too hard for the water to soak in. That will change as temperatures continue to warm up.

"Then yeah, you are going to have to put a little bit of love on your lawn, but when you do that, you want to keep real short run times. Just on your watering days and space if out pretty good," said Gebhardt.

Reno looks to ditch $1.4 million payroll system after cost overruns, user problems

This week's Reno City Council meeting starts at 10 a.m. Wednesday at city hall. Anjeanette Damon/RGJ


Anjeanette Damon, adamon@rgj.com 5:05 p.m. PDT March 22, 2016



Paycheck(Photo: Getty Images/iStockphoto)

After spending $1.3 million on an automated payroll system that has never worked as anticipated, the city of Reno is admitting it has a problem.

Since entering into a $1.2 million contract with Automatic Data Processing for a new payroll system, the city has encountered cost overruns, lagging paycheck delivery and a buggy user-interface.

Now, city staff is recommending the Reno City Council terminate the contract with ADP early—a move that would cost Reno $700,000 in fees.

But Reno City Manager Andrew Clinger said terminating the contract and going with a new payroll vender, New World Systems, would save the city nearly $500,000 a year.

"We admit to the fact the system that we thought was going to save us money is not saving us the money that was anticipated," Clinger said of the ADP contract. "The system is not doing what we thought it would, so we are recommending to terminate it."

The Reno City Council is expected to make a decision on the system at its meeting Wednesday.

The Council hired ADP in 2012 to automate its paper payroll system. By 2014, the contract cost nearly $100,000 more than was anticipated and the implementation was rocky.

The biggest problem, Clinger said, is the new system ADP designed doesn't interface with the city's financial system, which cuts checks for other spending and keeps track of all of the city's accounting.

New World Systems is the city's vendor for its financial system, which is why the payroll system from that company will be so much cheaper than the ADP system, Clinger said.

"This will be adding a module to that system as opposed to implementing a whole new stand alone system," Clinger said.

According to a staff report, the NWS system will cost the city $61,126 a year in operating costs, compared to $515,744 in operating costs for the ADP system. Implementing the NWS system would cost $258,000.

"No. 1, we will get a more efficient system, and No. 2, it will actually be a savings to the city of Reno," Clinger said.

Clinger said he is talking with the city attorney about the city's options for avoiding the $700,000 in early termination fees for the poorly performing system.

TMWA Warns of Phone Scam Involving Missed Payments

Posted: Mar 24, 2016 9:33 AM PDT Thursday, March 24, 2016 12:33 PM EDT*Updated: Mar 24, 2016 10:16 AM PDT* Thursday, March 24, 2016 1:16 PM EDT

From Truckee Meadows Water Authority:

Phone scammers posing as Truckee Meadows Water Authority (TMWA) employees are targeting customers in the TMWA service area. The scammers are indicating that water service payments have not been made and the service is about to be disconnected for non-payment. TMWA became aware of the scam late Wednesday when an alarmed local restaurant called to question the legitimacy of a phone call they had just received. They had been threatened with water-service disconnection if they did not pay immediately.

“So far we’ve only been contacted by two customers but it seems likely those aren’t going to be the only ones,” said Andy Gebhardt, TMWA customer relations director. “It appears these are random calls within the TMWA service area, so we want everyone to know about it. The caller does not have any specific water account information, but simply a phone number and address. The toll-free number the scammers are providing for call-back is not a TMWA number.”

The only valid methods of paying your TMWA bill are listed at **www.tmwa.com**, and the only valid telephone number to pay over the phone is TMWA’s main customer service line at 775-834-8080.

If you receive an unsolicited call asking for a payment on your TMWA account, please take down the telephone number, refuse to make a payment and call local law enforcement or TMWA at 775-834-8080.

From Truckee Meadows Water Authority

Environmental Protection Agency gives UNLV grant for water conservation research

A building leased for decades to the Environmental Protection Agency is shown Monday on the UNLV campus. The university will regain four buildings after a lengthy decommissioning process by the EPA. (JAMES TENSUAN/LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL)

By ANA LEY
LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on Wednesday gave UNLV nearly $330,000 to fund new water conservation research.

UNLV's engineering college will use the money to study the risk of contaminants in water recycling systems across the United States. The award was part of a $3.3 million federal grant doled out among five institutions tasked with examining water conservation practices nationwide. Other recipients include the University of California, Riverside; Utah State University; the Water Environment Research Foundation; and the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

EPA officials say conservation practices that promote water reuse are becoming increasingly important — especially in the West, where factors such as climate change, extreme drought, and population growth are shrinking water sources. UNLV researchers will evaluate how these practices can affect public and environmental health.

"The research UNLV will be doing can help advance the role that recycled water plays in meeting our long-term supply needs," EPA regional water director Tomás Torres said in a statement.

Contact Ana Ley at aley@reviewjournal.com or 702-224-5512. Find her on Twitter @la__ley.

Ask Joe: Where will water come from for Slide the City?

By Joe Hart Friday, March 25th 2016

MORE MEDIA

One of our viewers has a question about what looks like a fun activity coming to Reno this summer. It's called Slide the City. It's a giant water slide which will be set up on Ralston Street in early June.

I've had a lot of comments on Facebook about this ever since I posted a picture of the slide when they announced they were coming to Reno.

Denny Radford says he thinks this would be "way cool," but he asks, Aren't we still in a drought? He wants to know where the water would come from and who who is going to pay for it.

Here's what I found out:

Slide the City is a giant slide that goes from city to city during the summer months, and it is coming to Reno June 4.

So what about water? It is an issue. The event was cancelled last year because of concerns about the drought.

I checked with the folks at Slide the City, and they tell me they expect to use between 8,000 and 12,000 gallons of water for the event.

To put it into perspective, the average household uses up to 24,000 gallons of water during a typical summer month, according to TMWA. So the slide would use less than half of a what a typical customer uses during the summer months.

The folks at Slide the City tell me they plan to purchase the water they will use from TMWA, the Truckee Meadows Water Authority.

But when I checked with TMWA spokesperson Marlene Olsen, she told me TMWA has not been approached about this, and she said there is no agreement in place with Slide the City.

Olsen said there would have to be an agreement in place before Slide the City could use that water, and again, there is no such agreement in place right now.

One other point to make: The city of Reno and Slide the City representatives say they are working with the University of Nevada, Reno to treat and recycle the water that is used so that it does not go to waste.

Our view: What are Nevada lawmakers hiding?

14 public records that made Reno better informed

Public records are everyone's right to see. Here are 14 public record cases that have captured the attention of Northern Nevadans. These include Burning Man, Tesla, Wolf Pack coaches' salaries, struggling elementary schools and unsafe intersections.

In this June 1, 2015, photo, members of the Nevada Assembly work late into the night voting on a number of bills before they close the 78th session of the Legislature in Carson City. One of the bills passed was one making lawmaker communications secret except for final votes.(Photo: Lance Iversen/AP)

In the final hours of last year's Nevada Legislature, a bill was rushed through and passed unanimously making almost all communications by lawmakers secret.

This harms the public's interest in understanding the actions of their representatives.

The state Senate and Assembly have the ability to temporarily change the policy themselves each session. They should do this if they believe in the government transparency so many of them trumpet — and they should make the change permanent.

This law only recently came to light when the Associated Press asked top elected officials in each state for emails using their public accounts in the first week of February and for their calendars showing whom they met with during that time.

The AP's Michelle Rindels sent requests to Gov. Brian Sandoval and the Legislature's top four leaders: Michael Roberson, Aaron Ford, John Hambrick and Irene Bustamante Adams.

The governor's office responded with his calendar and asked for a little more time to go through emails before releasing them. Lawyers representing Nevada's top legislators gave a flat no and, among other reasons, cited the last-minute Assembly Bill 496.

It gives legislative immunity from public records requests covering all lawmaker communications outside of final votes. To understand the totality of this secrecy, one must read the law's language. It says communication regarding the following situations can be hidden from the public:

"Any actions, in any form, taken or performed with regard to any legislative measure or other matter within the jurisdiction of the Legislature, including, without limitation, conceiving, formulating, investigating, developing, requesting, drafting, introducing, sponsoring, processing, reviewing, revising, amending, communicating, discussing, debating, negotiating, allying, caucusing, meeting, considering, supporting, advocating, approving, opposing, blocking, disapproving or voting in any form."

On Jon Ralston's public affairs TV show "Ralston Live," Legislative Counsel Bureau lawyer Kevin Powers said the bill did not change the law but merely codified existing case law into statute.

The argument he gave in favor of the law is that legislators should be able to have a free exchange of ideas with constituents where people can feel able to say absurd or extreme things in order to further discussion. Making such communication publicly accessible would stifle the ability to deliberate on issues, Powers said.

On the other hand, it is difficult to understand how it serves the public interest to keep secret when lobbyists are tempting legislators via in-person meetings, email or texts — especially when the legislators are using taxpayer-funded accounts and equipment.

While Nevada is not alone in its secrecy, some states do not feel the same. Oregon, for example, has a state law classifying officials' emails as public record. An AP report noted top lawmakers there complied with the calendar and email requests and that "some information was redacted, including phone numbers, addresses and details about specific events."

The legislative process is not harmed by the public being able to know what lawmakers are doing in their name and who is trying to influence them. Rather, it is strengthened.

It is strengthened because the light of public accountability increases the likelihood of honesty whereas darkness increases the opposite.

Candidates in this election year have the opportunity to stand for transparency in government and against secrecy. All of us should ask them where they stand.

Nevada's legislative secrecy law is too broad, and lawmakers next session should fix it.

CORRECTION: The above editorial was updated to reflect that the legislation in question was AB496.

Camping Not Allowed Near the Truckee River in Sparks

Posted: Mar 29, 2016 11:30 PM PDT Wednesday, March 30, 2016 2:30 AM EDT*Updated: Mar 29, 2016 11:30 PM PDT* Wednesday, March 30, 2016 2:30 AM EDT
By Ryan Canaday
Email
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producers@ktvn.com

The Sparks City Council made a decision on Monday that states it is now illegal to set up a campsite within 350 feet of the Truckee River inside city limits.

Steve Driscoll, the Sparks City Manager, estimates that there are nearly 15 homeless encampment sites along the Truckee River within the city.

He says the new ordinance will ban camping near the river immediately, but there are still a few steps that must be taken before changes occur.

Driscoll says officials must first show any individuals living near the river proof that the law has changed. Then the city will have to instruct anyone in any encampments to leave immediately. Following that, the city will follow up by offering services that can help these individuals find a better place to stay.

"Hopefully we'll get them out of their encampments and get them into another other home, living arrangements if you will," says Driscoll.

One program called Washoe County Crossroads can help these homeless individuals find a new place to call home.

Ken Retterath, Division Director of Washoe County Social Services, says if the people near the river are trying to turn their life around, crossroads is a good start. Especially since the intentions of the program are to help as many people as they can make the transition out of homelessness.

"We serve about 154 homeless individuals and the goal here is to really get them back on their feet and get them back into society," says Retterath.

Driscoll says the goal behind banning camping alongside the Truckee River is to protect not just the river, but also the city's residents.

“Anything that happens along there just works in the river and there are people downstream that this is their drinking water, so we need to be very careful by not polluting the river," says Driscoll.

Improved California spring snowpack won't end drought

Posted: Mar 30, 2016 12:32 AM PDT Wednesday, March 30, 2016 3:32 AM EDT*Updated: Mar 30, 2016 12:32 AM PDT* Wednesday, March 30, 2016 3:32 AM EDT

By SCOTT SMITH
Associated Press

FRESNO, California (AP) - State drought surveyors will trudge through deep snow Wednesday to manually measure what could be close to a normal Sierra Nevada snowpack for this time of year.

A year ago, Gov. Jerry Brown stood on the same spot - then a dusty patch of ground with no snow - to announce that the dire drought required residents to cut back water use by 25 percent.

Surveyors expect to find much more snow this time thanks to the El Nino storms that have drenched Northern California.

But Doug Carlson of the state's Department of Water Resources says it won't end the record dry spell.

Still, state water board spokesman George Kostyrko said agency officials expect to soon re-open a discussion of the conservation order issued by Brown.

Goodsprings Elementary kids to be tested for lead exposure

Jason Hidalgo, jhidalgo@rgj.com 12:22 p.m. PDT March 31, 2016

The Goodsprings Elementary School sign is shown Wednesday, Jan. 10, 2006, in Goodsprings, Nev.(Photo: Tiffany Brown, AP)

Students at Goodsprings Elementary School will be tested for lead exposure following an investigation in water quality across the state by the Reno Gazette-Journal and the USA TODAY NETWORK.

Testing is scheduled this Wednesday at the Clark County school, which is located about 38 miles south of Las Vegas. The testing was spurred by the Southern Nevada Health District.

“The testing is being done as a precaution,” said Lori Headrick, director of environmental health and safety for the Clark County School District. “We don’t have any data that suggests that lead exposure has occurred (in students).”

Goodsprings Elementary School was one of 23 sites with public water systems that exceeded action levels for contaminants in drinking water, according to data obtained by the RGJ from the state through a public records request as part of a joint investigation with the USA TODAY NETWORK.

RENO GAZETTE JOURNAL

23 public water systems in NV non-compliant, including 3 for lead

Of the 23 public water systems deemed non-compliant by the Nevada Department of Environmental Protection, Goodsprings was one of three that exceeded action levels for lead. Sampling from a water fountain at the school’s community center revealed lead levels of 16 parts per billion, exceeding the action level of 15 parts per billion set by the Environmental Protection Agency.

Headrick says the community center is not used frequently by students.

"The school and the county have an agreement to use that community center, which is Clark County property, but we rarely do," Headrick said. "We mainly use it during inclement weather when it's too hot or too cold for students to go outside for P.E. or recess."

The issue involving the community center water fountain has been fixed but requires approval from the Southern Nevada Health District before it can be turned on again, according to Headrick. Old fixtures and pipes are a common source of lead contamination but testing also will be done on the school's main water source as a precaution as well.

As the day begins students of four different grade levels at Goodsprings Elementary School raise the flag and say the Pledge of Allegiance in Goodsprings, Nev., Wednesday, Jan. 10, 2007. (Photo: Tiffany Brown, AP)

"We're going to test the source for lead and copper and then move forward to a final solution (based on the results)," Headrick said. "We'll be looking into ways to renovate the system so we eliminate any further incidents of elevated lead levels, even though they were just slightly above the action limit."

News of elevated lead levels get increased attention in Goodsprings because of its history of lead mining. The community also is not on the Las Vegas Valley Water District and has various individual wells. The health district indicated that it wanted to test the whole community as well but that would require more time for planning and outreach so immediate testing will focus on the children that attend the school, Headrick said. Goodpsrings Elementary is a school with a history that dates back to 1913 and has a small population of about seven or eight students, according to the school district.

In the meantime, the school is providing bottled water to students as it waits for more testing to be done. So far, the district has not heard from the Environmental Protection Agency or Nevada Department of Environmental Protection about any potential action involving the school since the district sent its report to the EPA in February.

Although the district does not expect any issues from the testing results, it is still important to take precautions, Headrick said.

"The priority for the school district, first and foremost, is the safety of the students and staff," Headrick said. "We also expect to do more outreach with the community."

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March 29, 2016

Will there be a Truckee River rafting season this summer?

Lake Tahoe water level

As of Tuesday morning, Lake Tahoe was at 6,222.84 feet above sea level, according to the U.S. Geological Survey. Its natural rim is 6,223 feet.

TAHOE CITY, Calif. — Lake Tahoe's water levels are currently about 2 inches below the lake's natural rim, but levels are expected to rise with spring snowmelt.

"Current forecasts predict we're going to get about a foot to a foot and a quarter above the natural rim — which would give us some output for a while, but evaporation will take it down very quickly," Chad Blanchard, the federal water master who oversees the distribution of water from Lake Tahoe and two area rivers, said this week.

Blanchard added that Lake Tahoe's water is doing considerably better than last year, when levels just barely made it to the lake's rim after a fourth-consecutive mild and dry winter.

The best-case scenario for increased flow of the Truckee River would involve continued precipitation through spring and thunderstorms in early summer.

Factors such as evaporation and ground water absorption play a large role in lake levels, Blanchard said, and any number of variables can make water levels extremely difficult to predict.

Blanchard uses data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the National Weather Service to figure out how much water he needs to release from the lake and several other reservoirs in order to meet supply, streamflow and flood control requirements.

SHAKY OUTLOOK FOR FLOATING

From a recreation standpoint, while many at Lake Tahoe are focused on the recent spate of wintry storms that will likely allow area ski resorts to stay open well into April, if not May, others are looking ahead to the summer and the possibility of rafting on the Truckee River.

"At this point the forecast does show us getting potentially raft-able flows for a short time, but it really depends what the weather does between now and then," Blanchard said this week.

The minimum water level required to open Tahoe reservoirs to flow into the Truckee River is below 500 cfs. This is referred to as the Floriston Rate — a long-standing federal rule that stipulates that as long as the flow is high through Floriston in the Truckee River, the U.S. District Court Water Masters Office (where Blanchard works) can't release extra water from Lake Tahoe.

Aaron Rudnick of Tahoe-Sierra Recreation, a Tahoe City-based business that employs several seasonal workers in the summer when conditions allow, echoes the uncertainty of a rafting season between Tahoe City and Alpine Meadows this summer.

"If we get it, it will most likely be a short season, and we don't know when it will be," said Rudnick.

Rudnick is hoping for the best, but wants to be realistic about the challenges an extremely short season would present, noting that two weeks of rafting may not be enough to cover the costs of opening.

Tahoe-Sierra Recreation and other Tahoe City-based rafting companies were unable to operate at all last summer, and the 2014 rafting season was cut in half due to drought conditions.

WHITE WATER RAFTING LOOKING GOOD

Forecasts are more optimistic, however, for the whitewater rafting companies operating farther down the Truckee River.

While rafting on the first section of the Truckee is completely dependent on flows out of Lake Tahoe, whitewater operators guide on a section fed by many sources, including Donner Lake and Stampede and Boca reservoirs.

“We are going to get flows,” said Lorraine Hall, business manager for Tributary Whitewater Tours. “We will know a lot more in April, but we’re currently looking good to operate at least through July – very possibly longer.”

Tributary Water Tours was unable to guide on the Truckee River last summer, and had to stop early the year prior, though the company was able to continue operations on the nearby American River.

“This year looks a lot better,” added Hall.

Those looking for up-to-date lake levels can visit the Truckee Meadows Water Authority’s real-time, animated map at tmwa.com/lake_level — its information is provided by the USGS.

Updated information for the Truckee River forecast is expected following the April 1 snowpack readings. The updated Water Supply Index (WSI) forecast will be available Friday, April 8, through California’s Department of Water Resources.

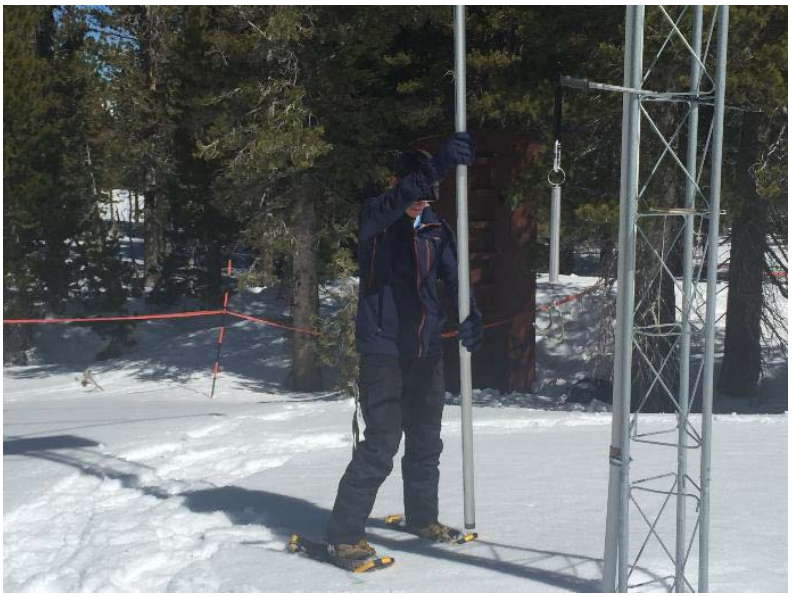
Nevada snowpack at 100% of normal

By Colin Lygren |

Posted: Fri 5:53 PM, Apr 01, 2016 |

Updated: Fri 5:55 PM, Apr 01, 2016

MT. ROSE, Nev. (KOLO) -- This was the best winter we've had in years. A snow survey Friday, April 1, 2015 revealed the Truckee Basin will end the snow-season at 100% of normal.



"It is great news. After 4 years of drought, we have not seen snow like this since 2011," said Jeff Anderson, Hydrologist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

April 1st is significant because it is typically when we see the peak snowpack for the season. That fact held true for this survey. Anderson found 111 inches of snow at the Mt. Rose site.

"If you were to melt that down it would be 42.1 inches of water content which is 114% of normal for this time of year," said Anderson.

Throughout the entire Truckee basin the totals are a little lower at 100% of normal which is still excellent.

"This is money in the bank. We have made it to an average amount and there is still is a possibility of more storms in April," said Anderson.

We're in a drastically better place than we were last year when the same snow survey found us at 36% of normal at the Mt. Rose Summit.

The good news from this snow survey will translate to good news this summer on the river.

"It has been a long time coming. Hopefully we continue this trend," said Patrick Fritchel, Engineer with the Federal Water Master's Office.

He says flows should be normal in the Truckee through September.

"(It is a big deal) considering last year when you could walk across the river. I don't think you will be able to do it safely this year," said Fritchel

The snow is also proving positive for Lake Tahoe which is still an inch below its natural rim. With an efficient run-off we could see the lake rise by a foot sometime this summer.

Flowing forward

There are multiple aspects to the Reno River Festival, and the low water levels impacted some parts last year. The kayaking competition, at the heart of the event location, was canceled for the first time in the 12-year history of the event due to low water levels.

May marks the beginning of the kayaking season. This year, the Reno River Festival will feature the 2016 Freestyle National Championships, which will bring the best kayakers in the country to the Truckee River and hopefully re-establish the Whitewater Park as one of the top in the world.

The festival events routinely attract over 35,000 visitors, according to the Reno River Festival website. This high volume of visitors at the river in one weekend may help drive the water recreation tourism for the area as people witness water actually flowing down the river.

According to the United States Geological Survey (USGS), March 25 showed about 800 cubic feet per second flowing down the river. Kerri Lanza, engineering manager for Environmental Services of Reno Public Works, indicated that there is water in the river bank-to-bank and it is flowing at a brisk clip. Lanza also shared that in June of 2015, the river was flowing only at about 100 cubic feet per second. In August, there was no flow coming out of Lake Tahoe, the only releases were from upstream storage dams at approximately 35 cubic feet per second or less. “From my window here at city hall, there was barely a trickle of flow down the river,” Lanza said.

Although the lack of water did not hurt turnout for the event last year, Reno River Festival is adding a 5-mile bike ride through downtown to hopefully drive turnout up even more this year. Liquid Blue Events, who purchased the event last year, hopes to roll out something new every year to keep attendance high. “People love Riverfest,” Jess Horning, co-owner and founder of Liquid Blue Events, stated.

> “People love Riverfest.”Jess Horningco-owner and founder of Liquid Blue Events

Attendance is important to the Reno River Festival, as it helps create opportunities to keep the event lucrative. The event has changed hands over the years, partially due to revenue struggles. Horning, explained the need to find consistent income to keep the event profitable.

One of the monetary difficulties the event faces is that it is free to the public. The incorporation of different villages, including craft, retail and a beer garden, helped entice people into spending money at the event last year. Liquid Blue Events is also focusing on the event providing strong branding, meaning companies that join as a sponsor in some capacity will have great exposure to people of the community over the course of the entire weekend. These sponsorships help keep the event profitable. Horning also said that Reno-Sparks Convention and Visitors Authority (RSCVA) and the City of Reno have been of great help promoting and supporting the event.

Liquid Blue Events is hoping to see continued growth for the event that had record high attendance last year.

Their goal is for Reno River Festival to be a kickoff event for summer in the northern Nevada region. The event provides unique exposure for downtown Reno. Horning, explained that having a river run through the heart of a city’s downtown district is something worth drawing attention to and creating an event around. “The event invites people to see the beautification of downtown [Reno] and what has happened,” Horning elaborated.

The Reno River Festival takes place Mother’s Day weekend, May 7-8, along the Truckee River downtown. For more information, visit www.renoriverfestival.com.

The Latest: California farms receive mixed water allotments

Posted: Apr 01, 2016 11:52 AM PDT Friday, April 1, 2016 2:52 PM EDT*Updated: Apr 01, 2016 11:52 AM PDT* Friday, April 1, 2016 2:52 PM EDT

FRESNO, California (AP) - The Latest on California's drought (all times local):

11:40 a.m.

Federal officials say farmers in Northern California can expect to receive all of their requested water deliveries this year, while those to the south will likely receive a fraction.

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation on Friday announced its initial water plan for California.

David Murillo, Reclamation's Mid-Pacific Regional Director, says a nearly average amount of rain and snow fell this year; but the past four dry years have left their mark. California remains in a drought emergency.

The El Nino weather system was felt strongest in Northern California, where farmers will receive their full allotment.

San Joaquin Valley farmers, however, will be hit hardest, receiving just 5 percent.

Gayle Holman, a spokeswoman for Westlands Water District, said in a statement that the allocation is grossly inadequate; it shows how California's water delivery system is broken.

6:20 a.m.

Federal officials will say how much water some California farmers can expect to receive this year in one of the nation's most productive agricultural regions.

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's announcement on Friday affects San Joaquin Valley farmers, spanning California's interior from Stockton to Bakersfield. It is home to about one-third of California's farmland.

Because of drought, many of the farms in the last two years received no water from a vast system of reservoirs and canals.

Farmers say they fear another tough year, despite the El Nino weather system causing Northern California reservoirs to spill over.

Farmers have been forced to buy expensive water, rely heavily on groundwater or fallow fields.

State officials, who run an interrelated system, have said they'll provide 45 percent of the water their customers requested.

Drought-stricken California ponders future of conservation

Posted: Apr 04, 2016 12:44 AM PDT Monday, April 4, 2016 3:44 AM EDT*Updated: Apr 04, 2016 12:44 AM PDT* Monday, April 4, 2016 3:44 AM EDT

By SCOTT SMITH
Associated Press

FRESNO, California (AP) - State regulators say water conservation orders calling for shorter showers and brown lawns could be lifted for some Californians even as drought lingers for a fifth year.

Officials at the State Water Resources Control Board say they'll open a discussion Monday on the next steps for the drought emergency. Gov. Jerry Brown last year instituted strict conservation orders. The recent El Nino weather system eased the drought in some parts of the state.

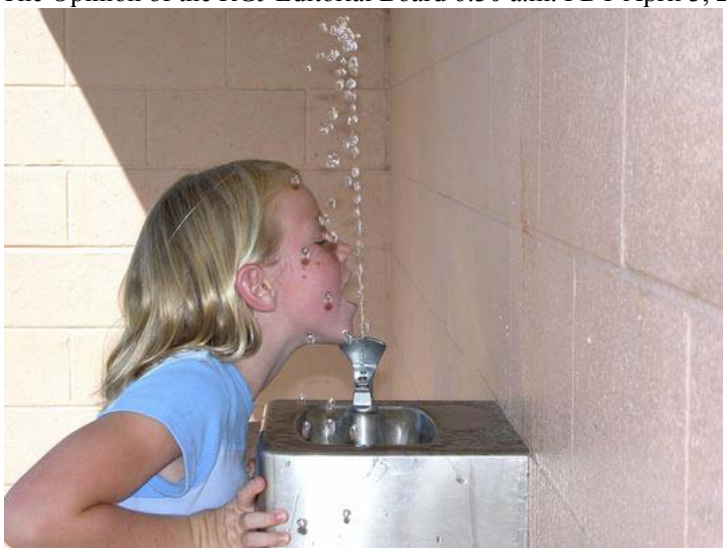
Felicia Marcus, chair of the state water board, says one possible change is to relax - or drop - water restrictions for El Nino-soaked Northern Californians.

She says rules for residents of drier Southern California could remain in place.

On Monday, the state releases conservation figures for February.

Our view: Contaminated water needs closer look

The Opinion of the RGJ Editorial Board 6:30 a.m. PDT April 3, 2016



An RGJ public records request found 23 public water systems in Nevada were noncompliant with EPA standards.(Photo: Getty Images/iStockphoto)

Residents in the rural southern Nevada town of Goodsprings have been drinking lead-contaminated water at their community center.

Testing on the water was done in September and confirmed no later than February, but it was not until a recent report by the RGJ's Jason Hidalgo that anyone decided to test the students at the adjacent school for lead exposure.

The data was obtained by the RGJ through a public records request to the state of Nevada. This is just the latest such request to spur government officials into action. Another recent example was RGJ reporter Anjeanette Damon's look into squalid conditions at Reno-Sparks assisted living homes that prompted the state to immediately inspect group homes for the mentally ill.

RENO GAZETTE JOURNAL
Our view: What are Nevada lawmakers hiding?

RENO GAZETTE JOURNAL
Our view: Support for Sparks government secrecy scary

While no public water systems in Washoe County were found to have lead problems, other contaminants came up.

- The Mount Rose Bowl Homeowners Association had noncompliant levels of copper.
- The Silver Knolls Mutual Water Co. had noncompliant levels of arsenic.
- And the Rosemont Water Co. had noncompliant levels of uranium.

Additional scrutiny on these systems — and perhaps of the people who have used water there — is warranted. The Washoe County Health District should weigh in on how much scrutiny.

Even those who had no contact with those public water systems should pay attention.

The Truckee Meadows Water Authority's system serving most Reno-Sparks residents was EPA compliant, but the safety examinations looked only at water in public pipes. Once that water goes into a private home, it can become contaminated. For example, buildings constructed before 1989 may have lead solder on pipes.

Contaminants can reach excessive levels when water has been sitting in pipes for extended periods. Despite drought concerns, experts recommend letting water run for a while first thing in the morning or after getting back from vacation, especially if living in an older home.

Also, hundreds of Washoe County residents live on properties with private wells, which were not covered in the testing. They should seriously consider doing their own.

A number of local companies do water analysis, and tests that people can conduct themselves are available online and at home improvement stores.

In Goodsprings, 38 miles south of Las Vegas, the Southern Nevada Health District is offering to test the blood of anyone who drank the community center's water. For those who test positive for lead, it will do a free analysis of water in their homes.

Even more widespread testing may be necessary if examination shows the community center's old pipes are not the sole source of lead. That region has a history of lead mining, and it would not be a surprise if private wells — the area's main source of water — also have elevated lead levels.

The RGJ's joint investigation with the USA Today Network of water quality revealed 23 non-compliant water systems in Nevada. The larger water systems did not show contamination problems. This is good news.

But local health agencies in areas where problems were discovered — such as Marigold Mine Potable Water System in Humboldt County and the Fort Churchill Power Plant in Lyon County, both of which had too much lead — should step up to address concerns.

Nevadans near noncompliant water systems deserve more information to help them understand if they should have their blood tested or if their home wells are at a higher risk for contaminants.

The Latest: California misses water conservation target

Posted: Apr 04, 2016 12:01 PM PDT Monday, April 4, 2016 3:01 PM EDT*Updated: Apr 04, 2016 12:01 PM PDT* Monday, April 4, 2016 3:01 PM EDT

FRESNO, California (AP) - The Latest on California's drought (all times local):

11:55 a.m.

Officials say residents of drought-plagued California fell just short of the state's mandated water conservation target in February.

Officials said Monday that Californians used nearly 24 percent less water in the month, missing the 25 percent water cuts ordered last year for urban users by Gov. Jerry Brown.

Felicia Marcus, chair of the state water board, says Californians did a good job saving water, despite coming up short of the goal.

California is now in the fifth year of drought, even though an El Nino weather system delivered a near-average year of rain and snow.

Officials say that might impact the conservation order that has led to shorter showers and brown lawns in parts of the state.

12:40 a.m.

State regulators say water conservation orders calling for shorter showers and brown lawns could be lifted for some Californians even as drought lingers for a fifth year.

Officials at the State Water Resources Control Board say they'll open a discussion Monday on the next steps for the drought emergency. Gov. Jerry Brown last year instituted strict conservation orders. The recent El Nino weather system eased the drought in some parts of the state.

Felicia Marcus, chair of the state water board, says one possible change is to relax - or drop - water restrictions for El Nino-soaked Northern Californians.

She says rules for residents of drier Southern California could remain in place.

On Monday, the state releases conservation figures for February.

Goodsprings Elementary kids, some adults tested for lead exposure

Nevada's 23 non-compliant public water systems

In early 2016, a joint investigation by the Reno Gazette-Journal and USA TODAY NETWORK revealed 23 public water systems in Nevada that exceeded levels set by the Environmental Protection Agency for contaminants. Efforts are underway to bring all sites back into compliance.

- PUBLIC HEALTH

  DRINKING WATER SAFETY

  Data obtained by the Reno Gazette-Journal from the Nevada Department of Environmental Protection through a public records request in early 2016 revealed 23 public water systems in the state that were non-compliant with drinking water standards involving contaminants. These contaminants range from lead and uranium to arsenic and coliform. For a list of non-compliant systems, tap or swipe this interactive graphic. (Note: Data was originally obtained on Feb. 18, 2016. Since then, some systems such as Silver Knolls are back in compliance.)

- DRINKING WATER STANDARDS
  LEAD
  Three sites exceeded the EPA action level for lead of 15 parts per billion:
  - Marigold Mine Potable Water System, Humboldt
  - Goodsprings School, Clark
  - Fort Churchill Power Plant, Lyon

- DRINKING WATER STANDARDS

  COPPER
  Two sites exceeded the EPA action level for copper of 1.3 milligrams per liter:

  - Coeur Rochester Inc., Pershing
  - Mount Rose Bowl Homeowners Association, **Washoe**

- DRINKING WATER STANDARDS
  ARSENIC
  Ten sites exceeded the EPA maximum contaminant level for arsenic of 10 parts per billion:

  - Alamo Sewer and Water GID, Lincoln
  - Wilde's Manor, Churchill
  - Frontier Village Mobile Home Park, Clark
  - Desert Paradise Mobile Home Park, Clark
  - McDermitt Water System, Humboldt
  - Old River Water Company, Churchill
  - Roark Estates Water Association, Clark
  - Lamoille Valley Plaza, Elko
  - Silver Knolls Mutual Water Company, **Washoe**
  - Shoshone Estates Water Company, Nye

- DRINKING WATER STANDARDS
  NITRATE

  One site exceeded the EPA maximum contaminant level for nitrate of 10 milligrams per liter:

  - Windmill Ridge, Lincoln

- DRINKING WATER STANDARDS
  URANIUM

  One site exceeded the EPA maximum contaminant level for uranium of 30 micrograms per liter.

  - Rosemount Water Company, **Washoe**

- DRINKING WATER STANDARDS
  DISINFECTANT BYPRODUCT

  One site exceeded the running annual average level for total trihalomethanes of 80 parts per billion:

  - Hawthorne Army Depot, Mineral

- DRINKING WATER STANDARDS
  TOTAL COLIFORM

  Five sites had at least two samples that tested positive for the presence of total coliform bacteria:

  - Ruby Hill Mine, Eureka
  - Kings River Elementary School, Humboldt
  - Deer Creek Springs, Clark
  - Wilson Reservoir BLM Camp Ground, Elko
  - Bird Creek Camp Ground, White Pine

Nevada Division of Environmental Protection
RGJ research

 Jason Hidalgo, jhidalgo@rgj.com 1:28 p.m. PDT April 4, 2016

As the day begins students of four different grade levels at Goodsprings Elementary School raise the flag and say the Pledge of Allegiance in Goodsprings, Nev., Wednesday, Jan. 10, 2007.(Photo: Tiffany Brown, AP)

Lead exposure testing was conducted on students at Goodsprings Elementary School as well as some adults after an investigation in water quality across Nevada by the Reno Gazette-Journal and the USA TODAY NETWORK.

The blood tests were spearheaded by the Southern Nevada Health District in response to elevated lead levels found in water from a drinking fountain at the nearby community center. In addition to seven students, four adults also were tested on Wednesday, said health district spokeswoman Stephanie Bethel.

County health officials encouraged citizens of Goodsprings, a small town located about 38 miles south of Las Vegas, to take part in the tests.

RENO GAZETTE JOURNAL

23 public water systems in NV non-compliant, including 3 for lead

“After being informed by the Clark County School District that routine water testing indicated an exceedance of lead in the water system that serves both the Goodsprings Elementary School and Goodsprings Community Center, the Southern Nevada Health District is recommending voluntary blood level lead testing for anyone who may have consumed water at these locations since August 24, 2015,” Bethel said.

An official with the Clark County School District stressed that the water in the school itself did not exceed lead action levels set by the Environmental Protection Agency. Instead, it was drinking water from the nearby community center, which is county property but is also used by the school per an agreement with Clark County.

The drinking fountain remains turned off, said Lori Headrick, director of environmental health and safety for the Clark County School District.

“The testing is being done as a precaution,” Headrick said. “We don’t have any data that suggests that lead exposure has occurred (in students).”

The Goodsprings Elementary School sign is shown Wednesday, Jan. 10, 2006, in Goodsprings, Nev. (Photo: Tiffany Brown, AP)

Action level

Located in a sleepy town with a population of about 230, Goodsprings Elementary is a small school with a not-so-small history.

The town where it stands was once a booming mining district, considered the most prolific mining operation in the county and boasting hundreds of residents at the time. Today, Goodsprings is a ghost town that is known for attractions such as the Pioneer Saloon — the place where film star Clark Gable reportedly had a drink after learning that wife Carole Lombard died in a plane crash at nearby Mount Potosi in 1942. The town also was listed by the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission as a "zone area" for the Nevada Test Site in a 1955 document that detailed information about fallout and flash exposure to residents.

The Goodsprings Schoolhouse, meanwhile, is included in the U.S. National Register of Historic Places. First opened in 1913, Goodsprings Elementary is often touted as the oldest elementary school in the state. These days, the school has less than 10 students and shares a principal with Sandy Valley Elementary and Indian Springs Elementary.

In data first obtained by the RGJ from the state through a public records request on Feb. 18, Goodsprings Elementary School was listed as one of 23 sites with public water systems that

exceeded levels set by the Environmental Protection Agency for contaminants in drinking water. Of those 23 public water systems deemed non-compliant by the Nevada Department of Environmental Protection, Goodsprings was one of three that exceeded action levels for lead. Sampling from a water fountain at the school's community center revealed lead levels of 16 parts per billion, exceeding the action level of 15 parts per billion set by the Environmental Protection Agency.

The EPA has no safe level for lead in drinking water. The "action level," however, serves as a benchmark that triggers investigation and follow-up action. The EPA and Centers for Disease Control and Protection say that there is no safe level of lead in blood, particularly in children as even small amounts can cause serious health problems. In addition to adversely affecting a child's mental and physical development, lead exposure can be fatal at higher levels.

Lead was already on the state's radar because the EPA asked Nevada and other states to look at potential lead contamination in drinking water after the events at Flint, Mich., Headrick said. Gov. Brian Sandoval said he was pleased to learn that Nevada only has three small, non-residential water systems of concern for lead contamination and that the state took immediate action to remedy any possible issues involving Goodsprings Elementary. Sandoval added that the state is working with all parties involved to return those systems to compliance, with bottled water being provided until the issues are fully resolved.

"When the challenges in Flint became well-known at the end of 2015, we began to discuss the state of affairs in Nevada with respect to drinking water compliance for lead," Sandoval said. "I will continue working with the state's Department of Environmental Protection to ensure that Nevada is taking proactive measures to continue to ensure the health and well-being of all of our communities."

Blind spots

Part of the challenge with smaller communities such as Goodsprings is keeping close track of all water sources.

Goodpsrings is not on the Las Vegas Valley Water District, for example, and features various individual wells. The state has about 580 water systems that the Nevada Department of Environmental Protection oversees, including smaller ones such as the Goodsprings Elementary School system.

Unlike bigger water utilities such as the Truckee Meadows Water Authority, which serves 385,000 residents, smaller systems also do not have the financial and manpower resources that bigger systems can bring to bear.

"The smaller systems are the ones that tend to struggle with regaining compliance because they typically have limited financial resources so we have to collectively figure out ways to help that community get back to compliance," said Jennifer Carr, NDEP deputy administrator. "Larger systems such as TMWA also have more personnel to tackle projects whereas some of our smaller water systems are operated by one person who might be doing another side job."

Even regions such as the greater Reno-Sparks metro area can have scattered pockets outside the purview of major water utilities such as the Truckee Meadows Water Authority.

“Not all water in the Truckee Meadows is TMWA controlled,” said Will Raymond, Truckee Meadows Water Authority water operation supervisor. “You have a lot of privately owned mobile parks, a lot of scattered water utilities out in places like Verdi and Spanish Springs that we have no control over and do not receive TMWA water.”

Water systems in Nevada fall under multiple tiers and are tested based on a sampling schedule, which can vary based on their size or the risk level of the source. Some systems can be on a triennial sampling schedule of once every three years while others can have a shorter time frame. TMWA, for example, is on a reduced monitoring schedule for lead and copper because testing revealed levels for both to be so low in TMWA water and the utility has not had any issues with either contaminant.

At the same time, being on a triennial cycle does not mean a utility only does testing once every three years. There are still tests that TMWA does on a daily or monthly basis, not just for the treatment plant but the distribution center as well. TMWA also has the advantage of being a newer water system, which means it does not have lead in its distribution lines unlike the older infrastructure seen in areas such as Flint, Mich.

Even water from a major utility such as TMWA, however, can leave its infrastructure clean but end up being contaminated once it enters the plumbing system of an older house or building, which can be a blind spot.

“What we really have no control over … is the plumbing after the meter,” Raymond said. “What happens (when the water enters the distribution system of) a building or apartment complex is something we really don’t know.”

One thing that utilities such as TMWA do is to identify key properties for testing at the tap. In addition to older facilities built before Nevada banned solder that had a lead content higher than 0.2 percent in 1989, for example, schools are considered priorities for testing.

Asked about older distribution systems in the state that might have lead in their infrastructure, the state told the RGJ that it does not maintain a database of lead service lines.

“The water systems are responsible for knowing the materials within their systems,” Carr said. “So the information we have on water systems from that perspective is really related to information we get when (the water systems) do their lead sampling.”

Next steps

For Goodsprings, further action will depend on the results of the latest testing.

Although the issue involving the water fountain has been fixed, it can’t be turned on until the Southern Nevada Health District grants its approval, Headrick said.

County officials say they do not expect to see elevated lead levels in the people tested, especially in students based on usage of the facility.

“The school and the county have an agreement to use that community center, which is Clark County property, but we rarely do,” Headrick said. “We mainly use it during inclement weather when it’s too hot or too cold for students to go outside for P.E. or recess.”

Officials, however, plan to overhaul the system to prevent any potential problems in the future. Headrick says old fixtures and pipes typically are a common source of lead contamination but testing also will be done on the school’s main water source as a precaution.

“We’re going to test the source for lead and copper and then move forward to a final solution (based on the results),” Headrick said. “We’ll be looking into ways to renovate the system so we eliminate any further incidents of elevated lead levels.”

Testing results for children typically become available quickly but the health district can’t comment on them until parents are notified, Bethel said. Test results for adults will take a little longer, Bethel added.

The state, meanwhile, continues to work with the EPA as the federal agency bolsters water quality standards. Revised standards for coliform contamination are scheduled to take effect in April, for example. The EPA is also looking at creating standards for emerging contaminants such as Perfluorinated Chemicals or PFCs as well as microbeads.

“I have asked NDEP to work closely with EPA as it considers potential revisions to its drinking water regulations,” Sandoval said.

These include changes to EPA guidance involving lead and copper contamination. Sandoval says he has also instructed NDEP to inform him if any changes need to be made with the non-compliant water systems and how long such measures will take place.

In the case of Goodsprings, news of elevated lead levels receive even more attention because of its history of lead mining. It’s a history that dates back to 1856 when Mormons developed a lode mine in the area following the discovery of lead at Mount Potosi. Lead mining peaked in the early 1900s, continuing through the end of World War I, and was followed by a smaller spike in World War II.

The health district initially indicated that it wanted to test the whole community as well but that would require more time for planning and outreach, according to Headrick. Instead, immediate testing will focus on the children that attend the school and residents who used the community center, Headrick said.

The health district, meanwhile, will have contingencies in place should any of the people tested show elevated levels.
“If anyone is found to have elevated blood lead levels follow up testing will be performed by the Health District, and appropriate referrals to a medical provider will be made,” Bethel said.

"Additionally, Health District staff will conduct environmental assessments on the personal residence of any person found to have an elevated blood lead level to help further determine the source of the exposure."

Nevada's 23 non-compliant water systems

An original list of the non-compliant water systems in the state based on data received by the The Reno Gazette-Journal from the state on Feb. 18, 2016. Some sites such as Silver Knolls have since returned to compliance after steps were undertaken to fix the issues discovered.

LEAD

- Marigold Mine Potable Water System, Humboldt
- Goodsprings School, Clark
- Fort Churchill Power Plant, Lyon

COPPER

- Coeur Rochester Inc., Pershing
- Mount Rose Bowl Homeowners Association, Washoe

ARSENIC

- Alamo Sewer and Water GID, Lincoln
- Wilde's Manor, Churchill
- Frontier Village Mobile Home Park, Clark
- Desert Paradise Mobile Home Park, Clark
- McDermitt Water System, Humboldt
- Old River Water Company, Churchill
- Roark Estates Water Association, Clark
- Lamoille Valley Plaza, Elko
- Silver Knolls Mutual Water Company, Washoe
- Shoshone Estates Water Company, Nye

NITRATE

- Windmill Ridge, Lincoln

URANIUM

- Rosemount Water Company, Washoe

DISINFECTANT BYPRODUCT

- Hawthorne Army Depot, Mineral

TOTAL COLIFORM

- Ruby Hill Mine, Eureka
- Kings River Elementary School, Humboldt
- Deer Creek Springs, Clark
- Wilson Reservoir BLM Camp Ground, Elko
- Bird Creek Camp Ground, White Pine

Small fry

Trout released into Truckee

By Kelsey Fitzgerald

This article was published on 04.07.16.

One Thursday in March, Vanessa Burch-Urquhart's third grade class from Fernley Elementary School boarded a bus to Oxbow Nature Study Area in Reno. In their company were several tiny rainbow trout—each a little more than an inch long, each raised by Burch-Urquhart and her class as part of the Nevada Department of Wildlife's Trout in the Classroom Program.

Trout in the Classroom, initiated by the Truckee River Fly Fishers during the late 1990s, supplies participating elementary school groups with an aquarium and rainbow trout eggs. The program is now operated by NDOW, who deliver trout eggs to more than 100 classrooms around Nevada in mid-January. The students monitor the fish as they hatch and grow, and teachers use NDOW curriculum to incorporate the fish into lessons on biology, math, art, writing and other subjects.

"I had them keep a daily trout log, so they had to observe them and note any changes that they saw," said Burch-Urquhart. "When we first got them, I talked to them about hatcheries. We talked about the life cycle of the trout, too, so it was cool having them right in the classroom."

The trout begin as eggs, then hatch to "alevins"—tiny fish with yolk sacs attached to their bellies. Alevins feed off their yolk sacs, hanging low in the gravel at the bottom of the fish tank (or river) until the yolk sac is used up. During the next life stage, the fish become "fry," which swim out of the gravel and move higher in the water to find food. After several weeks in the classroom, the fry are ready to release, and students travel to local ponds and rivers to free their tiny trout.

Rainbow trout are not native to Nevada, but are stocked in the Truckee River and other water bodies because they are popular with fishermen. According to NDOW outdoor education coordinator Chris Vasey, the Trout in the Classroom program chooses to use rainbow trout rather than native Lahontan cutthroat trout because the timing of their life cycle fits in better with the school calendar.

At Oxbow Nature Study Area, NDOW wildlife educator Tricia Dutcher led Burch-Urquhart's students on a walk through the preserve, looking for appropriate trout habitat. The stagnant waters of the pond, students agreed, were not quite right. The Truckee River looked more promising.

Tricia Dutcher of the Nevada Department of Wildlife conducts a trout release at Oxbow Nature Study Area with students from Fernley Elementary School.
PHOTO/KELSEY FITZGERALD

For more information on NDOW's Trout in the Classroom Program, visit:
www.ndow.org/Education/Wildlife_Ed/Trout_In_The_Classroom/

A community trout release will occur at Oxbow Nature Study Area at 10 a.m. on April 9. More information is available through Oxbow's Facebook page:
www.facebook.com/OxbowNSA/

"Who can point out why this habitat might be better, based on what we know about the trout?" Dutcher asked the class. The students determined that the water in the river looked cleaner, felt colder, and had more bubbles than the water in the pond—all good things for trout. In pairs, they unscrewed the tops of the small plastic canisters that held their fish, and released them into an area of quiet water along the edge of the channel. The fish swam off.

For interested members of the public, Dutcher has been raising rainbow trout fry in Oxbow's visitor center, which will be set free on April 9 during a community trout release

Lake Tahoe reaches natural rim for first time since June 2015

By Colin Lygren |
Posted: Sat 7:07 PM, Apr 09, 2016 |
Updated: Sun 2:57 AM, Apr 10, 2016

TAHOE CITY, Calif. (KOLO) -- The wet winter has proven useful for Lake Tahoe. For the first time in 10 months, the lake reached the its natural rim Saturday, April 9, 2016. This last happened in June of 2015 when the lake stayed at or slightly above the rim for a 5 day stretch between June 10th and June 15th. Prior to that, the lake had been below the rim since October 16, 2014.

Rising above the rim is a significant benchmark for the
the wet season was beginning, the lake as more than 1.5 feet below its natural rim. In the time since, the lake has made significant rebounds due in part to an average seasonal snowfall, and more recently, the start of the spring melt. According to the National Weather Service in Reno 60 billion gallons of water have flowed into the lake since early December.

Unfortunately, reaching the rim does not mean we will immediately see significant flows in the Truckee River at Tahoe City. The lake will have to rise several inches above the rim before that happens. Lake Tahoe is unlike a manmade reservoir which can pull water from the bottom of the lake. Instead, water must flow over the rim and into the Truckee River. It could still be several weeks before we see enough water in the lake to create more than a trickle of flow. It will happen this season though. On April 1st, water managers told KOLO 8 News Now they expect the lake to rise a foot to a foot and a half above the rim this summer.

According the U.S. Geological Survey data, the last time the lake contributed significant flows to the Truckee River was sometime between late August and early September 2014. Soon after, the lake fell below the rim and has stayed there ever since, with the exception of those 5 days in June of last year.

We're still a long ways off from being where water managers would like us to be with Lake Tahoe. There is a total of six feet of storage capacity on top of the lake. Upon reaching the rim Saturday, Lake Tahoe will jump from negative capacity to 0% capacity. An additional 242 billion gallons of water would have to flow into Lake Tahoe for it to reach maximum capacity – something that will not happen this year.

While unlikely, it is possible the lake could reach maximum capacity next year. According to information provided by the Truckee Meadows Water Authority, the lake made such a jump between November of 2005 and June of 2006 when it rose 5.23 feet in 7 months, the second quickest recorded rise in the lake's history.

8 years later, Fernley flood victims win $18.1M settlement

SCOTT SONNER, AP Published: April 10, 2016, 11:08 am

FILE -- In this Jan. 5, 2008 file photo, a man walks amid the flooded area in Fernley, Nev. Eight years, dozens of lawyers and hundreds of thousands of documents later, more than 200 Nevada flood victims are finally going to get paid for damages suffered when a century-old irrigation canal burst and sent a wall of water into their homes in 2008. (Tim Dunn/Reno-Gazette Journal via AP, File)
FERNLEY, Nev. (AP) — Eight years, dozens of lawyers and hundreds of thousands of documents later, more than 200 northern Nevada flood victims are finally going to be paid for damages suffered when a century-old irrigation canal burst and sent a wall of water into their homes in 2008.

No one was killed or seriously injured but 590 homes in Fernley were flooded when water burst through a 50-foot breach in the canal's earthen embankment Jan. 5, 2008.

A 2-foot-tall wave swamped the neighborhood and water collected 8 feet deep in some parts of the rural town 30 miles east of Reno. More than a dozen residents were rescued from rooftops by helicopter, while others were taken to safety by boats.

Judy Kroshus, lead plaintiff in the class-action lawsuit the local irrigation district recently agreed to settle for $18.1 million, and her 2-year-old grandchild were stranded by water "up to our windshield" before her son waded several blocks to rescue them.

"We were lucky to get out," she said.

The aging, 31-mile canal is a key component of the nation's first federal reclamation project, started in 1903. It's owned by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation but managed by the Truckee-Carson Irrigation District (TCID). The bureau concluded within two months of the breach that burrowing rodents had weakened the canal, causing it to fail.

In July 2012, a federal jury returned a verdict during the liability phase of the trial finding the district's history of negligence in maintaining the canal was primarily to blame. Soon after, the district agreed to a $10 million settlement, but then backed out.

The damages phase of the trial was scheduled to resume two months ago, but the district agreed to the new settlement terms after its members voted in February to raise money to finance the damage award by selling off some water rights to the Truckee Meadows Water Authority. Judge Lloyd George approved the deal March 31.

"The settlement finally brings closure to those who were harmed through no fault of their own," said Patrick Leverty, lead co-counsel for the plaintiffs.

Kroshus, who's the director of a tribal health service resource center in Fernley, said she had to short-sell her flood-damaged home and bought a new one just a year ago. "It's not in the flood area," she said.

A similar rupture in the same vicinity flooded 60 homes in December 1996.

The $18.1 million settlement includes about $7.8 million in attorney fees and expenses.

Laverty said no one in the class objected to that part of the deal.

People on the move: April 8


Jessica Garcia, jigarcia@rgj.com 9:05 p.m. PDT April 7, 2016


Michele Sullivan.(Photo: Provided to the RGJ)

Michele Sullivan and Tabitha Carlisle, CPAs, recently joined the Truckee Meadows Water Authority staff. Sullivan will take over the position of chief financial officer. She has more than 25 years of accounting experience, most recently serving as senior manager of corporate accounting with International Game Technology. There, she was responsible for all accounting functions and regulations related to the consolidation of more than 60 entities and led a team to develop a system interface to report monthly accounting data when IGT was acquired by GTECH.

She also has worked as an independent accounting consultant, as chief accountant for FMC Gold, and began her career at Ernst & Young. The current TMWA CFO, Jeff Tissier, will be retiring this year. Sullivan will be responsible for the treasury function, internal controls, financial statement preparation, and information technology.


Tabitha Carlisle. (Photo: Provided to the RGJ)

Carlisle has been named TMWA's controller and has worked with companies such as PricewaterhouseCoopers, IGT and Fusion-io. Carlisle will be working on financial statement preparation, overseeing the day-to-day accounting transactions and assisting the CFO with TMWA's treasury function. The controller position at TMWA was unfilled for several years.

Wet weekend to soak Reno, fill Lake Tahoe

 Marcella Corona, mcorona@rgj.com 5:09 p.m. PDT April 8, 2016

The Reno Arch is reflected in a puddle of water on a rain-covered sidewalk in downtown Reno on Monday, Jan. 18, 2010. Forecasters expect rain and thunderstorms over the weekend in the Reno-Tahoe area.(Photo: RGJ file)

National Weather Service forecasters expect a wet weekend with some thunderstorms and enough precipitation to fill Lake Tahoe to its rim and causing water levels to rise in the Truckee River this weekend.

A low pressure over southern California was expected to track north across the Sierra and into Western Nevada by Saturday morning, meteorologist Marvin Boyd said. Forecasters expect periods of heavy rain with high elevation snow in areas above 8,500 feet.

“We’re not expecting more persistent precipitation until (Saturday),” Boyd said. “There is possibility we could get a thunderstorm here or there.”

Those thunderstorms could develop in areas north of Interstate 80, forecasters said on the National Weather Service website.

If everything comes together, the Reno-Tahoe area could see a half an inch to an inch of water in some places. Rain is expected to soak Reno and Sparks through the weekend and into next week.

“Some place will get very little and other places could get a little more,” Boyd said. “Some places could get up to an inch, but that’s in a wetter case scenario.”

Areas above 8,500 feet in elevation can receive up to 10 inches of heavy wet snow on the Sierra peaks. The snow could impact travel near thee Mt. Rose Summit and Carson Pass.

“The high temperature will drop to around 50, and that’s mainly because of cloud cover,” he said. “Then we’ll hang around in the mid-60s until a cold front comes in next week.”

Boyd said the low temperatures are “nothing remarkable” and that they are actually “pretty typical for this time of year.”

“We might see some river rises, too,” Boyd said. “In past years, the water would just evaporate, but this year the water locked in the snowpack will make it into the reservoirs.”

“We’re not expecting flooding, but just some higher river levels,” he said. “It’s nothing really major.”

Lake Tahoe is also forecast to reach its rim over the weekend, Boyd said.

“So we could see some water spilling over and into the Truckee River,” he said.

By Sunday, the brunt of the storm could move north of Susanville to Gerlach, but most of the moisture could remain over much of the Sierra and western Nevada, forecasters said.

Snow levels could drop below 8,000 feet in areas south of U.S. 50, forecasters

“Depending on how quickly the low exits the area, light showers may linger into Monday evening with continued cool spring time conditions,” forecaster said on the National Weather Service website.

More rain could continue to soak the Reno-Sparks area Tuesday through Thursday as a low pressure moves inland from near the Gulf of Alaska, forecaster said.

Marcella Corona covers breaking news for the Reno Gazette-Journal. Contact her at 775-788-6340, email her at mcorona@rgj.com or follow her on Twitter at@Marcella_Anahi or on Facebook at Facebook.com/Marcella.Anahi

RENO-AREA FORECAST:

Saturday: Showers; high 60, low 45

Sunday: A 50 percent chance of showers; high 63, low 45

Monday: A slight chance of showers; high 64, low 44

Tuesday: A slight chance of showers, partly sunny; high 61, low 44

TAHOE-AREA FORECAST:

Saturday: Showers, up to an inch rainfall likely; high 47, low 38

Sunday: Shower’s likely; high 49, low 38

Monday: A 40 percent chance of showers; high 51, low 36

Tuesday: A slight chance of showers, partly sunny; high 47, low 35

Source: National Weather Service

464 CONNECTTWEETLINKEDINCOMMENTEMAILMORE

Southern California water district buys delta land

Posted: Apr 11, 2016 1:27 PM PDT Monday, April 11, 2016 4:27 PM EDT*Updated: Apr 11, 2016 1:27 PM PDT* Monday, April 11, 2016 4:27 PM EDT

FRESNO, Calif. (AP) - Officials at Southern California's largest water district have signed a multi-million deal to buy several sprawling islands far north in the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta.

Metropolitan Water District on Monday announced the $175 million deal for 20,000 acres. Metropolitan provides 19 million residents with water, much of it shipped from the delta east of San Francisco.

Metropolitan is buying the land from the Zurich Insurance Group.

Metropolitan's general manager Jeff Kightlinger has said that the islands could be used for construction on a proposal to build two giant tunnels under the delta for shipping water to Southern California.

Barbara Barrigan-Parrilla, a delta advocate, criticizes the purchase as giving the Southern California water supplier too much access to water in the over-tapped delta.

She says she's continuing to fight the deal.

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California's tunnels spending prompts federal review

Posted: Apr 11, 2016 1:23 PM PDT Monday, April 11, 2016 4:23 PM EDT*Updated: Apr 11, 2016 1:23 PM PDT* Monday, April 11, 2016 4:23 PM EDT

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER
Associated Press Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) - Federal authorities say they will investigate whether California improperly used federal funds for Gov. Jerry Brown's proposed water tunnels.

The Interior Department's inspector general said in a letter made public Monday that it will look into the funding allegations. A group called Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility asked for the review, on behalf of an unidentified federal whistleblower.

Brown's administration wants to build two 40-foot-high, 30-mile-long tunnels to carry water from Northern California's Sacramento River to water districts further south. Supporters and opponents disagree over whether the project would further damage dozens of native species there.

The allegation charges the state improperly used $60 million meant to restore fish habitat on preliminary studies for the tunnels.

State and federal officials said Monday their agencies would cooperate with the review.

Community Initiative Looks To Create Singular Truckee River Plan | KUNR

MARCH 4, 2016 BY THISISRENO LEAVE A COMMENT

A broad coalition of community stakeholders is coming together to promote an ambitious plan for the Truckee River.

The public-private partnership is called the One Truckee River Initiative and it brings together more than 130 representatives from the county, city, local businesses and environmental groups.

Their goal is to draft a comprehensive master plan for the Truckee River tackling everything from water quality to public safety to stewardship.

Lynda Nelson is with the Nevada Land Trust, one of the organizations coordinating the effort.

“We do want to manage the river as one river. The whole idea is that there’s a seamless plan through Reno, Sparks, the county and then as we move downstream through other different jurisdictions.”

Read more from our media partner, Reno Public Radio: *Community Initiative Looks To Create Singular Truckee River Plan | KUNR*

Letter: TMWA must answer question of water at new developments

Reno Gazette-Journal 1 a.m. PDT April 13, 2016

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Letter to the Editor(Photo: RGJ, RGJ)Buy Photo

The potable water situation in Verdi is controversial and has been the subject of two recent “One View” opinion columns.

The controversy revolves around subtle legal issues involved with water rights, annexation and the responsibility of land developers. The fact that people require drinkable water is possibly the only undisputed fact in the entire controversy.

The proper authority owes us a forthright answer to the following question: Under what conditions will TMWA supply potable water to the proposed new developments? In default of a timely, responsive answer, pleas assign your investigative reporter to the matter.

Clay Freed, Reno

KUNR 88.7 RENO PUBLIC RADIO npr

Sierra Snowpack: Sometimes Average Isn't Bad

By MICHELLE BILLMAN · APR 5, 2016

- Reno Gets More Snow Than Tahoe
  2 weeks ago
- February Snowpack Falls Short
  1 month ago

NRCS Hydrologist Jeff Anderson measuring the snowpack in early 2015.
Credit Noah Glick

Northern Nevada had an average year for its snowpack, and sometimes being average isn't a bad thing.

Researchers measured 42.1 inches of liquid water on Mt. Rose Friday, which is above median for the end of the season.

"You know, the take home message is that this was a great year compared to the last four," said Jeff Anderson, a hydrologist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service. "Fortunately, we didn't dig the hole any deeper for the drought."

Anderson added that last week's surprise spring snowstorm offered a helpful boost, especially out east.

"The Ruby Mountains and the other mountains around Elko, they picked up a couple inches of water content, which is a couple feet of snow on the mountains and currently the upper Humboldt is 120% of average."

Anderson oversees about 100 snow telemetry sites across Northern Nevada.

Tags:
snowpack
environment
Lake Tahoe

Related Content

Tell the Board Submission: Michael O.

Customer contacted us multiple times concerning our policy of not notifying the landlord if the tenant is in danger of having their water turned off for non-payment. He also sent a letter to the Board, asking them to change the policy. I spoke to him for some time this morning, and he strongly feels that we are unreasonable for not notifying the landlord, and that it would be an easy fix. I told him that I would make sure the Board had his concerns. We wants to attend the next Board meeting to make sure they understand the problems. Told him that I would let him know when the meeting was so that he may voice his concerns.

Andy Gebhardt, TMWA Director of Customer Relations

From: [redacted]
Sent: Monday, March 14, 2016 4:58 PM
To: tmwaboard
Subject: Property owner agreements on rental agreements.

Gentlemen,

Today I received a notice, the "cut-in landlord addition".....Please pull it out and read it for this email to be better served.

3rd item: "If water service is disconnected for non-payment, the service will NOT automatically revert to the landlord's name"

Gentlemen,,,,I own rental property in CA and have owned this property for over 15 years. While I understand this is your "rules", you are placing me as the landlord in a potentially

very expensive depreciation in property value do to landscaping dying from no water and my not knowing of the termination of service until AFTER THE FACT....

Gentlemen, I as the ultimate person responsible to pay on a non-performing account and who will have to clear the account before the water is again turned back on,

I very strongly urge you to take this proposal to the BOARD and change your policy:

All property owners are ALWAYS listed as the debtor on the account, In the event a tenant fails to reply to the 1st late notice, the owner is automatically also notified

of the failure to pay....

That way gentlemen, the property can either pay it or turn the screws on the flunky tenant, that may have up and bailed without letting the property owner know about

the water being in "past due" condition....

In fact, gentlemen, If you look into my account from last week, that is exactly what happened @ 2754 Sky Horse Trail, Reno, 89511...My tenants bailed, but paid their

rent to me...never paid the final water bill and you were instructed by them to turn off the water!...When you should have in your "policy" on the computer account to

automatically contact ME,,,,Because of your lack of knowledge of this poor policy or just plain lack of care to provide quality service to your customers...I discovered

the water off over a week after it had been off...Luckily it's not landscape watering season.

BUT I did have to wait for 5 hours to have somebody come out and turn on the water to put it back in my name....I couldn't just let you go and do it without me being

there because there maybe open valves that wouldn't be identifiable until I inspected the opening of the valve....Consequently your "yard" crew had to make 2 trips out

to the property for a non-event! One to turn off and one to turn back on...should have never happened. Only did because of a poorly written "policy"...POORLY

As a licensed utility here in our great community, you have been given the honor of operating as a legal monopoly. You DO HAVE A FIDUCIARY responsibility to your customers

to provide a smooth and efficient product....That includes communicating with a property owner when property damage can result from your unwillingness to think about what

makes sense to your business and your customers, as opposed to just saying....Sorry mister,,,,you owe us money to turn back on and we like to pay our guys to drive around

town unnecessarily...and frankly Mr. Customer,,,we don't give a damn about your landscaping...

Very poor policy Gentlemen,,,,I hope this letter will be received with an open mind of a needed policy adjustment,,,,I'm willing to bet your bottom line profit will increase as well...

Think about,,,2 less trips in the truck and continual billing service....

I am more then willing to come to a meeting and discuss my idea...To not only help me and the thousands of landlords in the community, but yes, to help you guys

manage your business that reflects the pride of ownership to operate under your license for all of us.

Sincerely, Michael O.