

Emergency Water Resources of Tuolumne County

by Francie McGowan

According to the Tuolumne Utilities District (TUD), the county's water supply is very low due to the continuing drought. As of April 28, 2015 the Tuolumne Utilities District Board of Directors adopted Phase III water conservation measures. A mandatory water reduction of 30% has been set for all customers based upon their water usage of 2013. Our water comes from Pinecrest Lake and Lyons Reservoir. PG&E is predicting that there will be 12,000 acre-feet of water this year. But we need 16,500 acre-feet of water to address our usage. Phoenix Lake is the primary drinking water source for Sonora, Jamestown, Scenic View, Mono Village and East Sonora. One third of Phoenix Lake's water storage capacity has been lost over the past 100 years due to siltation.

Tuolumne Utilities District and the Tuolumne County Water Agency are taking steps to address the shortages of water due to the historic drought. According to the Tuolumne County Water Agency on water resources:

The Tuolumne County Water Agency was reactivated on May 21, 2013 to ensure adequate safe water and sewer services for the citizens of Tuolumne County, now and in the future, and to protect, enhance and expand water resources throughout Tuolumne County. The goals of the Tuolumne County Water Agency are to assure access to County water; diversification of the County water portfolio; conservation; achieve adequate water storage; and ensure secure, safe, and sustainable water and sewer infrastructure. The driving force is to ensure adequate water supplies to meet the diverse needs of a healthy and economically viable community. Such water supply needs include but are not limited to: domestic consumption; fire protection; economic development; base industries, such as recreation and agriculture; and habitat protection.

Just this last autumn, due to the continuing drought, Governor Brown issued the following:

Executive Order (EO) B-26-14 authorizes California Office of Emergency Services to provide California Disaster Assistance Act (CDAA) funds to households that have lost their drinking water due to the current drought. If you are experiencing any groundwater or surface water abnormalities, please take the time to fill out the intake form found on the Tuolumne County website, <http://www.tuolumnecounty.ca.gov/>. The County of Tuolumne and the Governor's Office will utilize the information to offer assistance at restoring water to the household to ensure that the residence has sufficient water for health and safety needs.

The Community Water Council was formed and has had a series of three meetings. Major Funding for this activity came from a public engagement grant awarded to the Tuolumne Utilities District (TUD) by the Davenport Institute. The goal of the public engagement process is to educate the public about their water supply and discuss water supply alternatives. Community forums will be held sometime this summer. The conclusion to the process would be for the public to make an informed decision on the future of water supply for Tuolumne County. Go to www.yourwaterchoices.com for more information about this project.

These are the steps being taken to ensure that we have enough water to meet our needs. But we, the customers have to take steps as well. Some suggestions for conserving water in our everyday lives:

1. Use a bucket in the shower to catch the water while waiting for warm water to flow. Use this water to water plants, to flush toilets.
2. Take 5 minute showers or less. Install low flow shower heads.
3. Add mulch to any existing planting beds, this will help retain any moisture in the soil.
4. Fix leaky toilets. This will save 30 - 50 gallons of water a day. TUD has free toilet dye tablets to check your toilets. TUD also has a toilet rebate program. If your home was built before 1992, you could be eligible to receive a \$45.00 rebate.
5. Rethink having a lawn. Lawns are the biggest consumers of water in the garden. Call the Master Gardener hotline to find out about alternative ground covers as well as drought-tolerant native plants. Their number is 209-533-5912

We are all in this together. Using water as if it were gold will help us survive this emergency drought period.

Sources: "On Tap," the Tuolumne Utilities District newsletter (www.tudwater.com).
California Department of Water Resources

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