

SCMU Review

(schmoo ri-vyoo) n. items of interest and information from your Santa Cruz Municipal Utilities

No.74 FALL 2022 SANTA CRUZ MUNICIPAL UTILITIES 212 LOCUST STREET, SANTA CRUZ, CA 95060 (831)420-5220 scmu@cityofsantacruz.com

Director's Message



I HAVE WORKED IN THE DRINKING WATER INDUSTRY my entire career, which provides a multitude of topics to draw from (pun intended)

for *SCMU Review* content: water quality, water supply, the cost of water, water infrastructure, new treatment protocols, state and federal regulations, water conservation, new technologies, etc., etc. But there is one topic that encompasses all of these, and is increasingly keeping me up at night: you guessed it, climate change.

Yes, I know that after close to three years of pandemic, political unrest, inflation, and waiting for the new season of *Ted Lasso*, piling on more climate change bad news can just feel like a whole bowl full of wrong.

So I'm here to share some good news — when it comes to planning for climate change, we're ahead of the curve here in Santa Cruz.

The City has an aggressive Climate Action Plan, and the Water Department has an aggressive plan to prepare for and respond to climate change.

In this issue of the *SCMU Review* we'll update you on state-of-the-art climate change hydrology modeling that we're using to plan for the future, as well as a progress report on the overhaul we're doing to your water system infrastructure to respond to climate change. And if that weren't enough, we'll also tell you about efforts to tie it altogether to secure your water future! Spoiler alert: it involves new *city policy*!

Rosemary Menard,
Water Director

"CLIMATE PROOFING" THE WATER SYSTEM

BECAUSE SANTA CRUZ GETS ALL ITS WATER SUPPLY FROM LOCAL SOURCES, and because much of our "backbone" water infrastructure was designed in the 1950s and 60s (before the Safe Drinking Water Act, before modern seismic standards, before many of our current water quality issues, before climate change was on the radar), Santa Cruz is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of extreme weather events.

Since 2015, we've been working on an aggressive plan to secure our community's water future in the face of climate change. The plan calls for replacement of critical infrastructure, an overhaul of our treatment processes and facilities, and additional sources of supply.

HISTORIC STORM DAMAGE

Landslides from the El Niño storms in 2017 wreaked havoc on the city's water pipes, pumps, and tanks. Key supply pipelines broke in landslides, telling us that as extreme weather events increase

with climate change, the need to replace 1960s and pre-1960s rigid, land-bound water mains with modern, seismically stable pipes was becoming increasingly urgent.

We're now in advanced planning stages to replace and relocate our most vulnerable water mains — some of them miles long, in mountainous terrain — to respond to this need.

Climate change-related water quality issues like increased algal blooms from heat, and increased turbidity from extreme storms and flooding, necessitate an urgent need to modernize our treatment capability. With our vulnerable supply, we must be able to use every single drop. We're in the final design phase of a facility improvement plan (FIP), years in the making, to completely overhaul the Graham Hill Water Treatment Facility. The FIP will use state-of-the-art technology to reengineer how we treat and process water.

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Workers repair 2017 storm damage to the water system



A Water Department team uses a masticator to reduce fire fuels in the Newell Creek watershed

THE COORS COMPANY OFTEN TOUTS “pure mountain spring water” as the source for their beer’s good taste. As water purveyors, we know that there’s truth to what Coors suggests — the cleaner the water, the higher the quality.

Which is why we have an entire section of the Water Department dedicated to protecting the watershed from where our water comes. Our Watershed Team works year-round to keep the watershed around sources like Laguna, Liddell and Majors creeks, and the upper San Lorenzo River, healthy and clean.

A wildfire in our watershed would have catastrophic impacts on the community’s water supply.

As we begin to get some rain, and fire season winds down, we want our customers to know about the good work our Watershed Team undertook (year-round) to ensure the watershed was once again free of wildfire:

- Oversaw Loch Lomond Recreation Area and enforcement of fire preparedness rules in the park
- Patrolled watershed lands to eliminate potential fire ignitions and maintain emergency access
- Expanded the width of fire breaks on watershed lands

- Removed invasive plant/ladder fuels on watershed lands roads
- Conducted tours of watershed lands and facilities with fire agencies to evaluate fire preparedness needs and emergency response procedures
- Planned for future enhanced vegetation management on watershed lands
- Participated on the board of directors of Fire Safe Council of Santa Cruz County
- Created a wildfire resiliency plan for the department
- Engaged in regional vegetation and fuel mapping efforts
- Assisted with development of a City-wide wildfire resiliency plan

After seeing much of California burn the past several summers, we are grateful for all of the efforts locally to keep our watershed and our community safe from fires this year.



The Reviews Are In: WaterSmart is a Hit!

“This was extremely helpful. I had forgotten we had left our soaker hose on overnight. Thanks for the alert!”

“Thank you so much for the notification! I was able to quickly find the leak and make it stop.”

“It was a broken plastic pipe on a sprinkler line! My husband just shut the system off. THANKS SO MUCH FOR THE EMAIL! We would have never found it!”

“Debris was lodged in sprinkler controller valve. Cleaned out and reassembled. Leak resolved. Thank you for the heads up!”

“We are having our home renovated. One worker failed to turn off an outdoor faucet all the way. It’s an outdoor faucet we rarely use. Because you notified us, we checked all of our faucets and discovered this one was not turned off all the way. Thank you!”

“It was one of the toilets. We estimated between 5–6 gallons per hour, so consistent with your algorithm estimate. Have turned it off and will fix tomorrow. Thank you for the email, as we couldn’t hear the toilet running at all.”

Have you signed up for WaterSmart? It’s a new tool for water customers to:

- Track hourly, daily, and monthly water use
- Get automated leak alerts
- Diagnose a high bill
- Set custom alerts for unusual water usage
- Access water conservation resources
- Pay bills

If you haven’t signed up, water you waiting for? It’s easy and fast!

<https://santacruz.watersmart.com>



Place your food pail at the start of your line of bins, two feet from the nearest bin.



Your pail of food scraps will be collected by a dedicated food scrap truck.

City Food Scrap Collection Diverts 40 Tons a Week From Landfill

OUR CITY OF SANTA CRUZ FOOD SCRAP COLLECTION PROGRAM has barely started, yet it is already diverting about 40 tons of food scraps from our landfill each week. These numbers will only increase as participation in our new state-mandated program grows. We thank you for doing your part to make this important environmental difference!

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

There has been a learning curve for all of us with this new program. Here are some tips to help ensure your new food scrap pail is contamination-free and seen by our drivers.

- Our crew do their best to remove all the food waste from your pail; if there is residue after collection, please place this in the trash.
- Place your food pail at the start of your line of bins, two feet from the nearest bin. It will be collected by a dedicated food scrap truck. This placement will help prevent the bin’s handle from getting caught during pick-up. Do not place the pail on top of other bins.
- We offer free reflective strips so that our drivers can easily spot your pail in the dark. Contact our Waste Reduction office at (831) 420-5594 or jkelly@cityofsantacruz.com to obtain a reflective strip.
- Remember: No bags of any kind, including compostable bags, are accepted in the food scrap pail. Bags can get wound up in the processing machinery and need to be removed by hand.

FOOD SCRAP MASH

City collected food scraps are turned into mash in a pre-processor at our landfill. The mash is currently being sent to Santa Clara where it is further processed into feedstock for a variety of products including pig feed, bio-diesel and fertilizer. Eventually, the mash will be sent to the City’s Wastewater Treatment Facility where it will be converted into biogas.

Some community members choose to compost their food scraps at home. If you would prefer to do this, we offer City residents a \$40 rebate on compost bins.

Or you might prefer to participate in a neighborhood composting cooperative like the one happening near DeLaveaga Elementary School. See these options at cityofsantacruz.com/foodwaste.

All three food scrap diversion options help to meet sustainability goals. A recent waste characterization study showed that nearly 25 percent of the contents of our landfill are food waste, on par with most California landfills. Your diversion of food scraps will greatly reduce this number — thank you!

RESILIENT SANTA CRUZ

Support Our Climate Goal of Net-Zero Emissions by 2035

THE CITY ADOPTED its 2030 community-wide Climate Action Plan in September.

You can view the 2030 Climate Action Plan at cityofsantacruz.com/climateactionplan

You can support the City’s climate target of carbon neutral emissions by 2035 as follows:

Resilient Santa Cruz is a one-stop-shop with rebates, resources and information to enable residents to take meaningful action. Sign up, join a team, track emissions and commit to reduce your carbon footprint to win prizes!

Visit resilientsantacruzcounty.org/santacruz to get started.



THE CITY’S WASTE REDUCTION team strives to help all residents and businesses understand the importance of reducing waste and properly disposing of what is not needed. Public outreach, container audits, webinars and the annual newsletter are a few of the ways important program information is conveyed.

Be sure to keep your eye out for the *Refuse & Recycling* newsletter arriving in your mailbox the first week of January. A “cut-out coupon” to use for a free drop-off at the Resource Recovery Facility is included.

Please note that coupons are no longer needed for bulky item pickups. Simply call Customer Service at (831) 420-5220 or email scmu@cityofsantacruz.com and ask about our convenient “on-call” pickup. If the utility bill is in your name, you are eligible to have up to four bulky items collected at one time or one item collected up to four times a year, free of charge.



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FILL AND SPILL

The City's water supply storage was also designed and constructed in the 1950s and 60s, and includes only one reservoir, Loch Lomond, which holds about a year's worth of water supply. The reservoir was designed to "fill and spill" annually, which it did, ensuring that each year the community could rely on reservoir water when the city's other sources — rivers and creeks — dried up in the summer.

But because of increased drought, the reservoir no longer reliably fills, and the city has no other significant supply storage — leaving us in a very vulnerable position during prolonged drought.

Which leads us to the most crucial element of responding to climate change — creating more storage and increasing our supply.

INCREASING WATER SUPPLY

The City has four viable water supply sources to consider: surface water, groundwater, recycled water, and desalinated water. Since 2015, we've studied how we might use each of these to increase the City's water supply, and which show the most promise of being "climate proof." While there's still work to be done, it's likely that a suite of supply projects will help us create and fill more storage. In the meantime, the City is taking a critical first step to securing our water future by considering new policy this fall to codify its commitment to the urgent need to acquire new supply.

Because of these factors, the state exempted the city from imposing further restrictions, including new restrictions on businesses already struggling to recover from Covid-19 impacts.



We Don't Need a Crystal Ball to Tell Us What the Future Holds...

THE WORK THAT THE WATER DEPARTMENT HAS DONE to study water supply over the past several decades continues to point to one conclusion: Climate change is a game changer, and because using water efficiently has become the rule instead of the exception, Santa Cruz residents will not be able to conserve their way out of the next long-term drought. Period.

Critical support to this conclusion is the work that Dr. Shawn Chartrand from Simon Fraser University has done to model future climate scenarios for the City of Santa Cruz. Using state-of-the-art technology, Dr. Chartrand has created thousands of plausible scenarios to analyze future temperatures and rainfall, and

how they will affect our future water supply — which is 100 percent reliant on local rainfall. The key takeaways from his work? That climate change is affecting our community now, *more quickly* than previously thought; that water scarcity will become increasingly difficult to predict, prepare for, and adapt to; that the public must be prepared for new strategies to ensure enough water is available; and that the city must implement projects to provide supplemental supply *now*.

You can watch a presentation of Dr. Chartrand's work to the City's Water Commission at <https://cityofsantacruz.sharefile.com/d-s64522a67961c4ead8867da97d91c2957>