



## City Declares End to Stage Three Drought Emergency, Adopts Stage One Water Supply Condition

Surface water supply conditions have improved;  
community-wide conservation still needed

After a historic seven-year drought period, this winter brought above-average rainfall that has improved water supply conditions, and the City's water supply forecasts show sufficient supply to meet demands through 2021. While water supplies have improved, conservation remains important to fully recover from the cumulative impacts of the drought, and to preserve water supplies for future dry years.

On April 9, 2019, City Council rescinded the Stage Three Drought Emergency and adopted a Stage One Water Supply Condition. With this action, prior drought water use regulations in effect under the Stage Three emergency are lifted; however, the City will continue to enforce its longstanding regulation prohibiting irrigation runoff and failure to repair leaks. Continuing conservation by the community to reduce water use is encouraged. The City's twelve-month running average water conservation is 30 percent, compared to 2013 water demands. The City is grateful to our customers for making conservation a way of life, which has been vital during the historic drought and will continue to be essential going forward.

The cumulative effect of the seven-year drought on the City's water supplies has been extreme, and it will take several years for some water sources to recover. Below is a brief status update on the City's water supplies:

- *Lake Cachuma*: The federally-owned reservoir is currently 80% full, but it is a shared resource with stored water belonging to other agencies, including downstream water rights.
- *Gibraltar Reservoir*: This smaller reservoir is owned by the City and is currently full. Use of water from the reservoir has been limited due to water quality concerns as a result of the Thomas Fire.
- *Groundwater*: The City relies on groundwater during droughts when surface water supplies are limited. In 2016, the City's groundwater basins reached historically low levels similar to 1992 (the last major drought). The City has been resting the groundwater basins to let them recover; however, it could take 5-10 years before the basins are completely replenished.
- *State Water*: The 2019 allocation from the State is currently 75% of the maximum annual amount. During the drought, the City contracted for supplemental water exchanges, via the State Water Project, from other water agencies outside the area. These exchanges were necessary to maintain State Water deliveries during the drought, but the agreements require that some water be returned over a 10-year period. The City's current water debt is equivalent to one-third of the City's annual water demands, and the City plans to return the water in the next few years.
- *Desalination*: The City's desalination plant has been operating since summer 2017, providing nearly one-third of the City's current water demands. The desalination plant has played a key role in improving reliability and resiliency during the drought, and it will continue to play this role by allowing us to rest our groundwater basins and recover from the drought.

- *Recycled Water:* The City's recycled water plant has been meeting the majority of recycled water customer demands since construction upgrades completed in November 2015.

The City is well positioned to accelerate the recovery process with the City's desalination plant in operation and continued conservation efforts from our community. The City is also initiating a pilot study for potential artificial recharge of treated water into the City's groundwater basins to help recover the water levels.

Regarding water rates, the City experienced significant increases in costs during the drought to provide reliable water sources and ensure public health and safety needs were met. The water rate study conducted in 2017, which informed water rates for Aug 2017–June 2020, assumed that the drought would come to an end within that period. Therefore, the current rates, and the rates that will become effective this July, already reflect a gradual recovery from the drought costs. While the majority of costs to operate and maintain the overall water system are fixed costs, the City's water rates are structured to encourage conservation, and reduced water usage results in a lower water bill. The City will be starting a new rate study in summer 2019 to reassess water rates.

For more information on water supplies, drought, and conservation, please visit [www.SantaBarbaraCA.gov/Water](http://www.SantaBarbaraCA.gov/Water).