

No one's saying 'drought,' but...

By PAUL BEATTY
Sentinel Staff Writer

Pray for rain and bring on the rain dancers.

Seed the clouds — if any of them show up this beautiful February.

The water supply for the city of Santa Cruz is down to about half of what it should be at this time of year, and officials are beginning to wonder if they'll have to order water conservation regulations.

"It's a little too early to say we're going to have some mandated measures to restrict water use, but if it continues to be dry and we don't get any more rain, the likelihood is there," City Water Director Morris Allen said this morning.

No one is using the word "drought," but with about 25 inches of rain logged in the Santa Cruz Mountains watershed instead of the 40 inches that are normal by this time, city officials are getting nervous.

"Right now, it's a very touchy situation," Allen said, "and the chance of rain

doesn't look too good for the next two weeks."

The city gets 95 percent of its water from Newell Creek and the San Lorenzo River, and stores most of it in Loch Lomond Reservoir.

The reservoir is down to 54 percent of its normal 95-100 percent supply at this time of year.

The amount of rainfall this year denies there is a drought, but the pattern of the rain, which drenched the county in the fall and fell off to lighter rains in winter, is causing the most of the problem.

Santa Cruz Weatherman Ron MacDonald explained, "The amounts of rain look OK, and it would be tough to call it 'a drought,' but the pattern this year is odd."

Santa Cruz got 11 inches in November instead of the usual 4 inches, 2.3 inches in December instead of 6 inches, 1.75 inches in January instead of 6.5 inches and 3.5

inches in February instead of 5 inches. The Santa Cruz area annually gets about half the 60 inches that are normal in the mountain watershed. This season, Santa Cruz has had 22.14 inches. The normal to this date is 23.46 inches.

In the drought years of 1976 and 1977, the city got 13.88 inches and 15.93 inches, respectively, for the entire season.

The rainfall in the watershed in those years has followed the same pattern.

Water conservation measures are not new in the city.

In the 1976 drought year, the city called for voluntary conservation by water users.

The second year of the drought, water restrictions were mandated and city residents were told under penalty of a \$100-a-day fine they could only use 25 gallons a day each. It was made illegal to wash house exteriors, sidewalks, driveways and porches.

Following the storm of 1982 that broke the main pipeline from Loch Lomond Reservoir, the city again mandated conservation. It lasted less than a month.

San Lorenzo Valley Water District also relies heavily on stream water and one of its directors, Mary Kelly said, "I don't like the way it looks."

She is going to ask for reports from the district manager on conditions of the water supply.

The areas of Scotts Valley, Soquel Creek district and Watsonville get water from wells and they are in good shape, say their managers.

Santa Cruz Mayor Mardi Wormhoudt said, "Clearly, it's been a dry winter, and I hope a conservation program won't be needed. If it does, we have shown we can do it.

"I think everyone is aware that a price we pay for lolling around in the sun in February is a shortage of water in the summer."

REFERENCE

SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL
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