

WATER SUPPLY 1990 -

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# Santa Cruz residents praised for voluntary water rationing

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Even though rationing had been dropped, Santa Cruz residents cut water use this summer by more than twice the rate city officials had expected.

"People did better than we asked," said Bill Kocher, director of the Santa Cruz water department. "You can't beat that."

From May 1 to Oct. 31, the department's 85,000 customers in Santa Cruz, Live Oak and the University of California, Santa Cruz campus used 11 percent less water than in pre-drought years.

Kocher and other analysts had predicted that residents would conserve by about 5 percent.

The unexpectedly low use means that Santa Cruz's only reservoir, Loch Lomond, contains about 289 million gallons more than it did at this time last year. That's an extra month's supply.

How much rain falls this winter will determine whether Santa Cruz has any restrictions on water use next summer.

What is most encouraging about the latest numbers, said Kocher, is that they show Santa Cruz residents are frugal with water even when they are not ordered to conserve.

The drought outlook improved considerably this year.

This summer was the first time since 1986 that Santa Cruz dropped odd-even watering days, fines for excessive use and aggressive rationing campaigns.

After heavy spring rains left Loch Lomond at its highest level in five years, water officials opted for a "voluntary conservation alert" instead of rationing.

Under the voluntary rules, only the most basic water regulations applied, such as not washing down pavement and requiring spray nozzles on garden hoses.

Loch Lomond also opened to public fishing this summer for the first time in four years.

Friday, the water surface at the reservoir was 549 feet above sea level, 54 percent full. Last year at this time, it was 43 percent full.

Substantial rains are needed this winter to bring the reservoir back to pre-drought levels, said Kocher.

Before the drought began in 1987, Loch Lomond was 100 percent full seven out of 10 years. Capacity is 2.8 million gallons, a two-year supply.