

# Santa Cruz begins early planning for deeper water restrictions

Water Supply - 2000

1-4-14



The San Lorenzo River is at its lowest level since 1991.

DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

Soquel Creek district also to consider restrictions

By J.M. BROWN

[jbrown@santacruzsentinel.com](mailto:jbrown@santacruzsentinel.com)

SANTA CRUZ — Receiving just 10 percent of average rainfall since July, the Santa Cruz Water Department announced Friday it has begun planning for the possibility of water rationing for the first time in nearly a quarter century.

With the San Lorenzo River, the primary water supply, flowing at low levels unseen since 1991, Santa Cruz faces the potential of a third consecutive dry year. Average rainfall, recorded from July to June, is typically 12 inches by this point of rain year, but so far only 1.3 inches has been recorded.

"Weather conditions can change quickly in winter, but it will take a lot of rain to make up for not only this recent

dry spell but the two previous years, as well," said Toby Goddard, administrative services manager and head of the water conservation program.

In late January, the Water Department will issue an initial supply outlook for 2014, offering a forecast that takes into account expected weather patterns, stream flow conditions

SEE WATER ON A4

## IF YOU GO

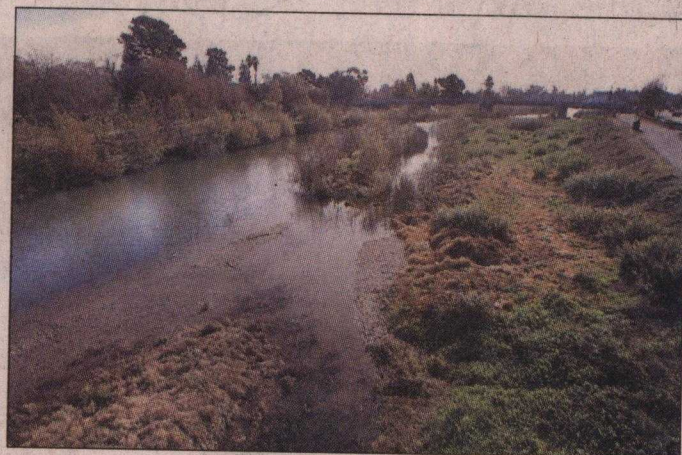
SANTA CRUZ WATER COMMISSION

**WHAT:** Discussion of commission's role on new Santa Cruz Water Supply Advisory Committee

**WHEN:** 7 p.m. Monday

**WHERE:** Council Chamber, 809 Center St.

**INFORMATION:** [www.cityofsantacruz.com](http://www.cityofsantacruz.com)



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

The low level of the San Lorenzo River raises the possibility of rationing.

## CONSERVATION INFO

The Santa Cruz Water Department offers conservation tips and information about rebates for high-efficiency devices at [www.surfcitysaves.com](http://www.surfcitysaves.com). Or visit the conservation office, 212 Locust St., Suite B, is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. For information, call 831-420-5230.



# WATER

Continued from A1

and reservoir levels.

Officials will revise the report in late February before finalizing the assessment in late March. The department may then ask the City Council to take steps to further cut water use.

The council agreed last year to extend restrictions on daytime irrigation and other measures put in place in May 2013 to reduce water use among customers by 5 percent. The city also now asks customers to shut off automatic irrigation systems.

Goddard said the Water Department is working to modify its billing system should rationing be required. He cautioned it is too early to say whether rationing is a real possibility, but said the cutbacks, if necessary, would take place by setting a water-use limit for households and businesses that, when exceeded, would trigger a price increase per unit of water.

The last time the city rationed water was toward

the end of a six-year drought in 1990. It has a range of voluntary reduction levels it can put in place depending on the seriousness of the water shortage.

The dryness in Santa Cruz is representative of a statewide problem.

On Friday, the California Department of Water Resources released its first winter snow survey. Readings of the snowpack statewide, which when melted each spring provides critical stream flow, indicates water content is a fifth of the average typically seen this time of year.

The snowpack has no bearing on the water available to Santa Cruz because all of the city's sources are driven by local rainfall. But the readings confirm 2013 is the driest year on record for many parts of the state.

"While we hope conditions improve, we are fully mobilized to streamline water transfers and take every action possible to ease the effects of dry weather on farms, homes and businesses as we face a possible third consecutive dry year," said the state's water resources director, Mark Cowin. "And

every Californian can help by making water conservation a daily habit."

## NEXT STEPS

The specter of rationing comes as the city is on the cusp of major developments in its long-term supply planning, including the expected release of findings from a yearlong master conservation planning process. The city's Water Commission could discuss the plan in February.

At 7 p.m. Monday, the commission will discuss its role in the 14-member Water Supply Advisory Committee approved by the council in November to lead a public exploration of options for the city, which serves 90,000 customers from the North Coast to Live Oak.

The city created the panel after suspending its pursuit of a controversial seawater desalination project amid growing public opposition. Although the city will not pursue an election in 2014 on whether to proceed with the project, it has left desal on the table as a potential solution for the committee to consider.

Applications to serve on

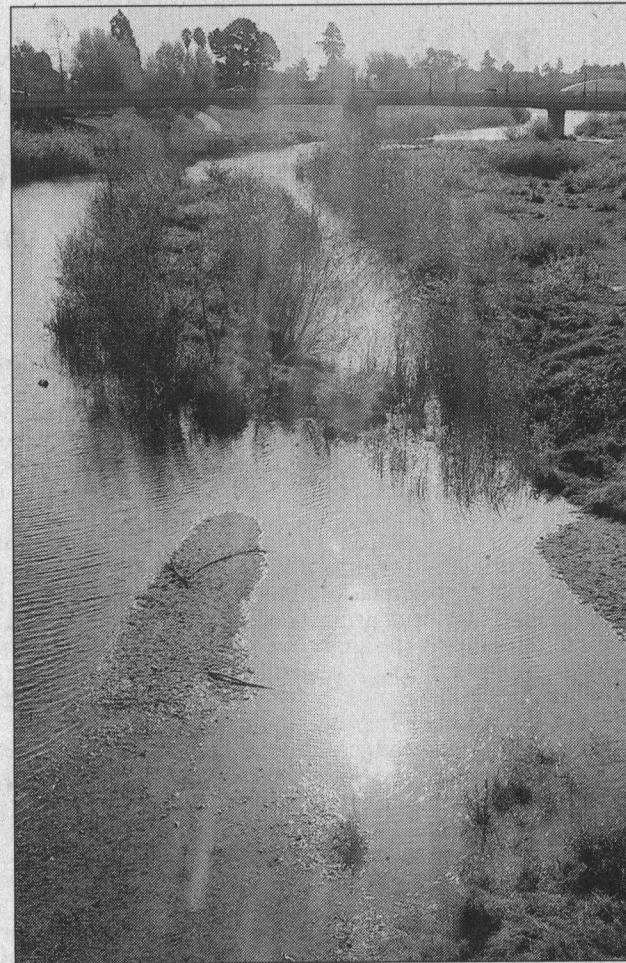
the committee are available at [www.cityofsantacruz.com](http://www.cityofsantacruz.com), and the deadline to apply is Jan. 13.

Meanwhile, neighboring Soquel Creek Water District also is considering rationing for its 35,000 customers from Capitola to La Selva Beach.

The city's partner in the stalled desal project needs to reduce groundwater pumping by about 30 percent for 20 years to restore a basin threatened by salt-water intrusion. The governing board voted last year to implement rationing if a new supply isn't found, but staff has encouraged a closer examination of the financial implications before committing to that path.

The board will discuss rationing at 7 p.m. Tuesday in the Capitola Council Chamber, 420 Capitola Ave. During the past few months, the board also has explored the potential for interagency water transfers, wastewater recycling and other measures for supplementing supply.

Follow Sentinel reporter J.M. Brown at [Twitter.com/jmbrown-reports](https://twitter.com/jmbrown-reports)



San Lorenzo river is at its lowest level since 1991.

DAN COYRO/SENTINEL