

Opinion

Weather

Sentinel Editorial

1-19-78

And The Rains Came

After two years of drought, the rains came to Santa Cruz, and to California.

Actually, there were three relatively dry years in the drought as the 1974-75 rainfall in Santa Cruz was 26.22 inches, more than five inches below normal.

However, both 1972-73 and 1973-74 were wet years with above average rainfall, 44.36 inches in 1972-73 and 39.59 the following year.

Blessed with higher than average rainfall this month, the local rainfall has now exceeded 20 inches, well above normal for this time of the year and sufficient to supply the watersheds.

Under ordinary circumstances the area can expect about 12 more inches of rain after January, so the prospects are higher than average we will surpass the current normal seasonal rainfall of 31.37 inches.

Actually, the rainfall normal depends on how many years you want to count. The present normal is based on a 30-year period from 1941 through 1970.

In the 30-year period from 1931 through 1960, normal was 31.72 inches. If you take a longer period, say 80 years or so, the normal is less, just above 28 inches.

Rainfall figures for Santa Cruz are available from 1878 so we are about to obtain a 100-year record to base further rainfall data.

The lowest rainfall on record was in 1923-24 with a low of 10.85 inches, just about one-third of normal. The highest was in 1940-41 with 61.62 inches in Santa Cruz and twice that much in Boulder Creek.

It is rare to have two straight years of either very high or fairly low rainfall, a factor in the recent drought.

For general purposes, rainfall below 15 inches would be considered extremely rare in Santa Cruz. It has only taken place five times since 1878 and yet we

almost had two years in that category preceding the present season, and we were below normal this year until the recent storms.

It is also rare to have two exceedingly wet seasons in a row, the last time was in 1939-40 and in 1940-41.

Strangely enough, that was also a freak period for in the first six months of the season, we had only 4.68 inches of rain, but then, as this year, things changed. In the next five months, the area had 45.28 inches of rain for a season; total of 49.96, followed by the record year.

Actually, for a calendar year 1941 was a real humdinger with 63.41 inches of rain in Santa Cruz.

For Santa Cruz, more than 50 inches of rain would be extremely high.

In the 100 years, the rainfall has been more than 50 inches in 1889-90 with 54.68 inches, the record 61.62 in 1940-41 and 50.17 inches in 1957-58.

However, it is not unusual to have more than 40 inches, nor less than 20 inches. Both happen about once every decade, although in 1968-69 and 1969-70 we had more than 44 inches, which would certainly be considered wet under any standards for this area.

One could assume that even though the rainfall is generally fairly good in Santa Cruz County, the growth in population necessitates the ability to store more water for the dry years.

Except for the period when the citizenry responded so well to the conservation program, we have been using more water every year.

We will probably do so in the future although we would expect some of the conservation trend to continue.

But the real lesson should be obvious. We must develop an ample storage system to maintain water service in both wet and dry years.

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