

What's On Tap



AT THE SOQUEL CREEK WATER DISTRICT

Low-Income Water Assistance Program

You may be eligible for a credit on your water bill. LIHWAP provides a one-time payment assistance benefit for low-income households on residential water and wastewater bills. HOA's are also eligible! This program is administered by the California Department of Community Services and Development and has provided over \$27,991 in helping our customers since November 2022. Learn more and apply online at www.taphelp.org.

Strengthening the Foundation

As Soquel Creek Water District embarks on an exciting new chapter in its history, it recognizes the achievements of a departing board member, welcomes a new board member, and celebrates the advancement of dedicated team members. During this period of transformation of becoming a groundwater replenishment agency, the District reinforces its commitment to excellence, community service, and the sustainable management of our water resources. *Continued on page 6*

Water Rates Study

Given the groundwater challenges with seawater intrusion, the mandate by the State to bring our basin back into sustainability, and our commitment to provide water to our customers 24 hours/7 days a week, it has become essential for water rates to be analyzed to ensure we have adequate finances for the next ten years. The District is a not-for-profit public agency and has been evaluating the current water rates to determine if they are sufficient to cover the cost of providing reliable, high-quality water services to our customers while also addressing the long-term sustainability of the groundwater basin and our infrastructure needs.

District staff and the rates consultants have also been meeting with an ad hoc Water Rates Advisory Committee to receive input and recommendations as part of the study. The Committee is composed of 10 public ratepayer representatives and two Board Members.

The analysis is completed in a series of steps. On October 17, the District's 10-year Financial Plan and revenue needs, which consider Board priorities, the needs of the District, and potential impacts on ratepayers, were presented to the Board of Directors.

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Our District team is dedicated to environmental stewardship, attentive customer service, and providing reliable, high-quality water.

District Updates

In August, we accidentally emailed our internal employee newsletter to our public newsletter audience. We promptly apologized for the mix-up; however, many readers wrote to us expressing how much they loved getting more details and an inside scoop about District staff and what're working on. Inspired by the reaction from these readers, here is a glimpse of what we've been working on lately:

Recognitions: In recent months, our District achieved significant milestones: a technological innovation award in August for tracking seawater intrusion from the CA Special District Association, a \$30 million Title XVI Grant from the Bureau of Reclamation in September, and in November, our Assistant General Manager, Melanie Mow Schumacher, was honored as the Recycled Water Person of the Year at the 2023 California WaterReuse Conference.

Community Building: We hosted the 5th annual Water Harvest Festival at Chanticleer County Park, creating a sense of community and offering family-friendly activities, including live music, Pure Water Kombucha, face painting, and educational water displays. Our sponsors, community partners, and dedicated District staff made this successful event possible. We're looking forward to next year!



The District partnered with Living Swell to brew and serve a special Pure Water Kombucha. Spirulina was used to make it a pretty aqua color. It was a hit at the festival!

Customer Journey Mapping: Three departments are collaborating to actively map customer journeys to understand and enhance the overall customer experience.

Financial Statement Audit: Each year, independent auditors review our financial transactions to ensure the accuracy and integrity of our financial statements. We're currently finalizing the audit for the fiscal year that ended on June 30, and our Annual Comprehensive Financial Report, previously recognized by the Government Finance Officers Association, will be presented soon.

Lobby Window: The recent pandemic emphasized the importance of health and safety for customers and employees during in-office interactions. We constructed a new ADA-accessible window and expanded the lobby area to better serve our customers.



The District's renovated lobby with a new ADA accessible customer window.

Optimization Study: The District, in partnership with the City of Santa Cruz (City) and the Regional Water Management Foundation, is making headway on the grant-funded Santa Cruz Mid-County Basin Regional Water Optimization Study. This study is looking at Pure Water Soquel (PWS), the City's planned Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR) projects and water transfers and exchanges to see how they can work together and be optimized to ensure Basin sustainability and help meet regional water supply needs. It is anticipated that the study will be completed in 2024.

Process Improvements: The District is transitioning to paperless workflows, enhancing efficiency, reducing our carbon footprint, and ensuring business continuity during emergencies. We've introduced electronic approvals for accounts payable and will soon offer the same for purchase requisitions. We've also adopted electronic document signing to boost employee productivity and improve interactions with customers and vendors.

Water Operations Upgrades: Improvements to our Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) system and radio telemetry systems, which help monitor and operate our existing water system, will also assist with integrating our new Pure Water Soquel facilities.

Ongoing emergency repair and maintenance: We are invested in maintaining infrastructure through leak repairs, preventative maintenance tasks, treatment plant operations, water quality program coordination, USA locate response, and production data management. Operations & Maintenance (O&M) staff work around the clock every day of the year, ensuring the continuous operation of the water system.



Our O&M team making repairs.

Storm Damage Repairs: Staff is working on the permanent repair of the water main on North Main Street that was destroyed by severe 2023 winter storms. This repair will ensure a reliable water supply for the affected areas.

Water Distribution Modeling: This year, we've been working on collecting data for a water distribution model recalibration project. This involved installing pressure logger devices to provide information to help test our system under various operating scenarios. This work helps us to improve and optimize water through our system.

Water Loss Report: A well-functioning water system is instrumental in minimizing water losses in our pipelines and other conveyance infrastructure. We continue to have a low level of water loss as compared to other suppliers as calculated in our most recent annual Water Loss report and audit.

Water Main Relocation and Buffered Bike Lane Project (Measure D): It has been a busy Summer for construction on our streets and highways! In response to Measure D, the County kicked off its Soquel Drive Buffered Bike Lane Project, which is creating ADA-accessible sidewalks and a safer bike lane along Soquel Drive from Harbor High School to State Park Drive. Due to this project, our 12" water main and a fire hydrant near Mar Vista Drive needed to be relocated. Previously, we replaced over a mile of 60-year-old cast iron pipe to prepare for the County's project and worked to coordinate road paving/sealing efforts.

Water Purification Center Tours: Since starting construction in December 2021, we've hosted 33 tours, including the State Water Board, the Bureau of Reclamation, and local project partners like the City of Santa Cruz. Each tour includes a presentation about Pure Water Soquel and a technical site tour. Public tours will be available in Fall 2024.



Community members on a construction tour of the Pure Water Soquel Purification Center.

WaterSmart: We continue to notify customers of leaks and offer tools and resources to help them find leaks and use water efficiently. Sign up today at <https://soquelcreekwd.watersmart.com/>

Rates *cont. from page 1*

Potential rate increases for the next four years and the bill impacts on customers will be evaluated. It will culminate at the December 19th Board of Directors meeting, when the Board will hear proposed rate scenarios for the next four years and provide direction to District staff or authorize proceeding with a Public Hearing in early 2024 to consider adoption of the proposed rates.

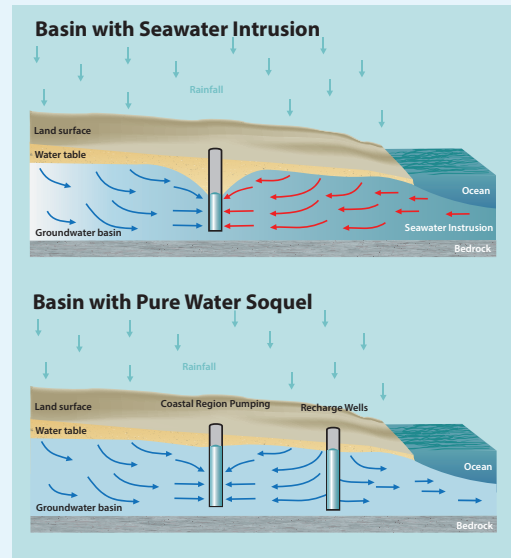
How to Participate and Learn More: District customers are encouraged to learn more and provide input by attending a Board meeting or an open house listed on the website. You may also submit comments and questions via ratestudy@soquelcreekwater.org or call (831) 475-8500 x132. Visit soquelcreekwater.org/ratestudy for more info.

Hydrology 101

What is seawater intrusion?

Seawater intrusion refers to the movement of seawater into coastal freshwater groundwater basins. This occurs when more freshwater is extracted from the groundwater basin than can be naturally recharged by rainfall; thus allowing saltwater from the ocean to infiltrate and contaminate the freshwater underground in the aquifers.

Check out our video at soquelcreekwater.org/306/Seawater-Intrusion



Pure Water Soquel Update

Construction for the District's Pure Water Soquel (PWS) Project broke ground in 2021 and is anticipated to be complete in Fall 2024. This Project will:

- Replenish the local groundwater basin that is designated Critically Overdrafted by the State of California
- Prevent further seawater intrusion and meet the State's mandate of basin sustainability by 2040
- Be a reliable, drought and climate-change resistant supplemental water source
- Diversify District's water supply portfolio and enhance resiliency
- Provide District customers with a high-quality and safe water supply.

We are very fortunate and grateful for the financial investment and continued support that State and Federal agencies have provided for the Project with grants and low-interest loans.

Thank you to everyone for their patience during construction!

Learn more at purewatersoquel.com



Conveyance pipeline being hung on the Laurel Street bridge.



Construction Photos

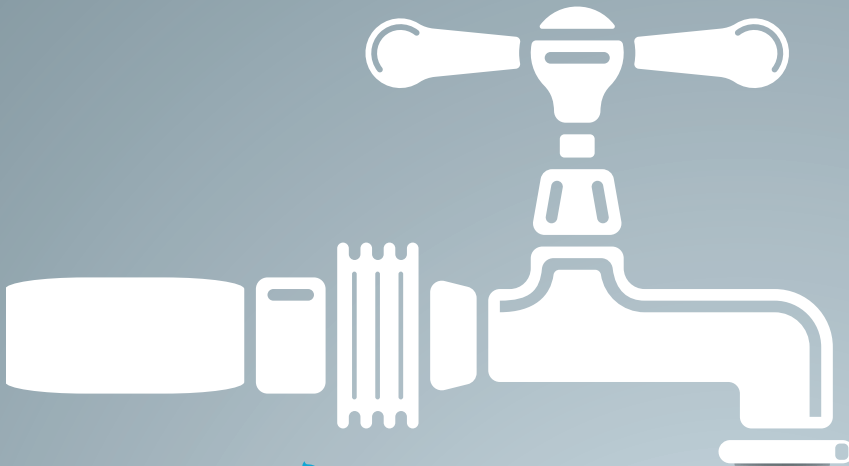



Willowbrook recharge well equipping.



A bird's eye view of the purification building and tanks at the Pure Water Soquel Purification Center.

BY THE NUMBERS

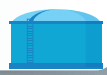

Serve
41,000 Residents **16,000** Connections

Pump and Treat
850,000,000 Gallons of Water





Support
18,000 Jobs **22** Parks **18** Schools

Manage
18 Water Storage Tanks


Manage
168 Miles of Pipeline

Oversee
1,258 Fire Hydrants



Operate
20 Production Wells

Test
80 Groundwater Monitoring Wells

Conduct
18,000 Water Quality Tests

Oversee
7 Interties

Maintain
15 Backup Generators **4** Portable Generators

Employ
48 Employees



Employee Spotlights

SARAH STEPHENS

Customer Service Field Technician II



I LIKE taking my nephew and niece to Psycho Donuts.

I KNOW better than to eat so many donuts in my advanced age.

I COULDN'T DO WITHOUT coffee and donuts.

IN MY FREE TIME I hike off all the donuts I consume.

MY SUPERPOWER is to always be on time or early.

ERIC SEGURA

Water Distribution Operator II



I LIKE watching cartoons.

I KNOW all the words to the "Mean Girls" movie.

I COULDN'T DO WITHOUT without the ocean.

IN MY FREE TIME I fix my Jeep and dirt bikes after breaking them.

MY SUPERPOWER is not needing, drinking, or liking coffee.

Foundation cont. from page 1

DR. BRUCE DANIELS: A LEGACY OF DEDICATION AND SERVICE

The District said farewell to longtime director Dr. Bruce Daniels, whose 23-year tenure on the board was marked by unwavering dedication to the District and a commitment to the betterment of the community. While on the Board, the District made remarkable strides in developing and achieving numerous goals, including innovative conservation measures like the Water Demand Offset (WDO) Program and the Pure Water Soquel Project. His deep understanding of climate change and water management issues have helped establish the District as a model for sustainable water practices. His legacy of leadership and his tireless efforts in advocating for responsible water management were valuable contributions to the community. Dr. Daniels officially left his position on June 19, 2023.

JENNIFER BALBONI: NEWLY APPOINTED DIRECTOR

Jennifer Balboni, a longtime Aptos resident, joined the District Board of Directors on August 15. She filled the vacant seat of Dr. Bruce Daniels after a rigorous application and interview process. Balboni, a California Certified Naturalist and former local

business owner, is committed to environmental stewardship, and serves on the District's Water Resource Management & Infrastructure Committee. Her dynamic background and community involvement make her a valuable addition to the District Board.

EMBRACING GROWTH: CELEBRATING EMPLOYEE PROMOTIONS

The District celebrates the hard work and dedication of several team members who have advanced within the agency:

- Nick Emmert was promoted to O&M Manager
- Eric Humble was promoted to O&M Supervisor
- Andy Villegas was promoted to Sr. Water Distribution Operator
- Jordan Talbot was promoted to Water Systems Operator I
- Courtney McEvoy was promoted to Contracts & Customer Billing Specialist
- Sarah Stevens and Drew Carlson were promoted to Customer Service Field Tech II



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More information is available at:
www.soquelcreekwater.org

Other ways to connect with us!

