

# What's On Tap



AT THE SOQUEL CREEK WATER DISTRICT

## Two Pilot Projects on Track for 2019

### Surface Water Purchase Pilot Project

After completing initial water quality testing and amending our safe drinking water permit, the District has scheduled surface water transfers from the City of Santa Cruz beginning in early December as part of a pilot study. This project is aimed at evaluating water quality issues with blending the City's treated surface water into our infrastructure, which has historically been conditioned to handle groundwater. A small amount of treated surface water will be served to approximately 3,000 connections in the Soquel/Capitola area of our District through April 2019. For additional information or to report any changes in water conditions, contact 831-475-8500 or visit [soquelcreekwater.org/surfacewaterpilot](http://soquelcreekwater.org/surfacewaterpilot).

### Seawater Intrusion Prevention Recharge Well Pilot Project

Funded by a Prop 1 Groundwater Planning Grant, the District will begin construction on a pilot project for a groundwater recharge well in January at Twin Lakes Church. Testing at the site will confirm the potential recharge and extraction rates of water that could be achieved in the aquifer. Soil and groundwater samples will be collected from the pilot well boring for geochemical and hydrogeologic analysis of the underlying aquifer. These tests will help determine the recharge capacity of the well and any post treatment that may be needed if a full-scale recharge well facility is developed. For more information, visit [soquelcreekwater.org/pilot-recharge-well](http://soquelcreekwater.org/pilot-recharge-well).

## Water Wise Academy - A Grand Success

The first Water Wise Academy class graduated November 3rd. The District customers who applied to be part of the class attended three sessions taught by staff from every department and learned how the District runs literally and figuratively. Presentations from District managers focused on hydrogeology, water conservation, supplemental water supply planning, budgeting and finance plans, engineering and construction projects, water conservation, and our infrastructure (wells, tanks, pipes, and pumps) to ensure high quality water is delivered reliably, 365 days a year. On the tour of the water system, the class visited a monitoring well, production well, booster pumps, and a tank. If you are interested in attending a future academy email [BeccaR@soquelcreekwater.org](mailto:BeccaR@soquelcreekwater.org).



Attendees listening to a presentation in the Learning Center.



(left to right) Rick Becton, Yvette Brooks, Vai Campbell, Nick Nichani, Jennifer Balboni, Cole Bitter

# The Finance of Water - Rates

**BACKGROUND** The District is a not-for-profit government entity, so revenue need is based on the cost to provide customers with water service and responsibly manage our groundwater resources. Water simply isn't as plentiful and inexpensive as it has been in the past. Water districts across the nation, and especially in California, are struggling with increased costs to operate and maintain aging water systems. Portions of the District's water system are over fifty years old and require more maintenance and repair than before. The District has made significant investments in the water distribution system to ensure water reliability, and more work is required. State and Federal drinking water standards are constantly evolving and expanding, and the District needs resources to continue to meet these standards and ensure the delivery of safe, high-quality water.

Revenue for water districts generally comes from two main sources, a fixed monthly service charge and the sale of water. When a water agency chooses a rate structure, there are a large number of variables and objectives to consider. Most agencies and their independent rate consultants rely on published guidance documents.

The District's fixed monthly service charge provides 35% of the needed revenue while water sales, based on an inclining tiered structure, provides the other 65%. For the last twenty years, the District has had an inclining-tiered rate structure, which means the price of water increases in higher tiers of usage. The challenge to this type of inclining-tiered rate structure is its heavy reliance on the amount of water customers use. When

customers use less water, the District's costs don't decrease because costs to maintain the water system are driven by the number of service connections, not by how much water is used (other than electricity and pumping costs). However, when less water is used the amount of revenue collected decreases considerably. As a result, rates have to increase in order to cover the fixed costs of providing water service to 15,800 service connections. This leaves customers feeling like they've been penalized for conserving water.

**RATE DEVELOPMENT** In May 2017, a Water Rates Advisory Committee, comprised of 10 District customers, two members of the Board of Directors, and relevant staff was formed to assist with the evaluation of rate structure alternatives. A rate consultant was

## YOUR WATER SYSTEM

**What it takes to bring YOU safe drinking water**

- Meeting state and federal safe drinking water regulations by performing 13,000 water tests annually for 200 constituents
- Financing the infrastructure needed to deliver safe water including replacing old water mains and relocating production wells away from saltwater contamination
- Protecting our groundwater from further seawater intrusion and bringing the basin into sustainability
- Maintaining 19 production wells, 9 treatment plants, 100 pumps, 173 miles of pipe, 5,000 valves, 18 storage reservoirs, and 80 monitoring wells that bring you safe drinking water
- Inspecting and fixing broken pipes, billing services, water conservation programs, 15,800 monthly meter reads, Water Wise house calls, public outreach, and school programs
- Technical expertise, staffing, and training to provide all these services

**Our goal is to provide you with safe and reliable drinking water 24 hours a day, 365 days a year**

## The Finance of Water - Rates continued

also hired to provide the technical evaluation. The intent was to determine whether a rate structure existed, or could be developed, that could meet the following objectives better than the District's existing tiered rate structure: Promote fairness and equity between customer classes; reduce revenue volatility and promote financial sustainability; encourage conservation and efficient use of water; and comply with all applicable laws. After extensive evaluation and input, the proposed rate structure consists of a simpler two-tiered structure relative to the four-tiered structure currently in place.

**CUSTOMER INPUT** The proposed rates will be presented to customers in early January 2019 through a written notice that will be mailed to each known property owner and water customer in the District. The notice will include the date of a public hearing regarding the proposed water rates, a description of how customers can provide input on the rates, and a table of the rates being considered.

**SUMMARY** For many years, groundwater levels in our area have been dropping and the groundwater



basin, the District's only source of water, is in a state of overdraft. Investments need to be made to protect existing groundwater resources and to find ways to augment the water supply and provide resiliency against climate change and other future water supply challenges. Water rates ensure this work, along with maintaining existing infrastructures, can continue and enable the District to achieve our mission of a safe, high quality, reliable, and sustainable water supply for today and for future generations.

## Are You Prepared for the Rain?

The rain has finally arrived and it's important to be prepared. Follow the checklist below to make sure you're ready:

- ✓ Turn off automatic irrigation controller and delay manual irrigation until soil several inches deep appears dry or plants appear stressed. An inch of rain generally provides enough moisture to forego irrigation for several weeks or more during the winter season.
- ✓ Delay turning the irrigation controller back on until water is needed.
- ✓ In the event of a power outage, make sure the irrigation controller did not re-program to a default mode to water everyday.

Check out our rebates for rain sensors, rain catchments, rainwater downspout redirects, and weather based irrigation controllers at [www.soquelcreekwater.org/conserving-water/rebates](http://www.soquelcreekwater.org/conserving-water/rebates)



# Water Harvest Festival was a Big Splash!

The District hosted its first Water Harvest Festival on Oct. 20th in partnership with Santa Cruz County Parks and the Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County. The fun water themed festival was held in the new Heart of Soquel Park behind the Soquel Post office. The park itself was engineered to harvest the rain through permeable hardscape and landscaped bioswales. The Banana Slug String Band sang children's music about watersheds while kids visited educational booths hosted by the local organizations and companies who taught visitors about water conservation, water wise landscaping, rainwater harvesting, groundwater, surface water, solar power, mosquito & fish life cycles and the ocean! Thank you to all the organizations that participated: Allterra Solar, Central Fire District, Love's Gardens, Monterey Bay Salmon and Trout Project, Mosquito Abatement of Santa Cruz County, Museum of Discovery of Santa Cruz, San Lorenzo Lumber, Santa Cruz Mid-County Groundwater Agency, Santa Cruz Natural History Museum, Save Our Shores, and the Water Conservation Coalition of Santa Cruz County.



Ellie trying on the water drop costume.



Banana Slug String Band performing.



Jim Kerr and Darcy Pruitt with the Santa Cruz Mid-County Groundwater Agency teaching Makani about wells and groundwater.



Angie Gruys from Resource Conservation District with the fish prints that kids and adults created.



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More information is available at:  
[www.soquelcreekwater.org](http://www.soquelcreekwater.org)

Other ways to connect with us!



**GET THE SCOOP ON WATER!** Water Wise presentations and tours are available for schools, neighborhood groups and organizations in the Soquel Creek Water District. Email [outreach@soquelcreekwater.org](mailto:outreach@soquelcreekwater.org) to schedule.