

Storm surge: Levees under patrol as water problems in Delta grow

Wednesday

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By [Alex Brettler](#)
Record Staff Writer

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Flooding concerns intensified in the the Delta on Wednesday as huge volumes of water surged down creeks and streams into the low-lying river estuary.

Higher than expected water levels had crews patrolling levees and watching carefully for any sign of trouble. An estimated 245,098 cubic feet of water per second was pouring into the Delta, the equivalent of nearly three Olympic-sized swimming pools every second.

And it didn't end on Wednesday: By high tide late Thursday, the rivers may be even higher as the slug of water from earlier storms passes out to San Francisco Bay.

"When the water's this high you could have a beaver hole open up and you could have a real problem. You could lose a levee," said Dante Nomellini, a Stockton attorney who represents Delta farmers.

Century-old Delta levees protect farmland that in some cases is well below sea level. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent improving the levees in recent decades, but they still are considered vulnerable to failures that can flood farms, roads and utilities and disrupt the water supply for much of California.

Evidence of the massive flow into the Delta was everywhere on Wednesday. The Calaveras River in Stockton was running high as officials began releasing some water from upstream New Hogan Lake to save room for future storms. Just 13 months ago, New Hogan was a mere 20 percent of average; this week, in a period of two days, it rose from 98 percent to 127 percent of average.

The Stockton Diverting Canal, a normally dry channel built more than a century ago to save Stockton from devastating flooding on the Calaveras, also was running high. Farther downstream, the water inched high enough to inundate the deck behind a home in Riviera Cliffs.

A similar rise was happening, but to a much larger extent, on the Mokelumne River, where the high waters broke through a levee early Wednesday and flooded farmland in south Sacramento County. The Mokelumne may crest even higher early Thursday, about 3 feet lower than its reach during the great floods of 1997.

To the south, the San Joaquin River is expected to continue rising as well, though it has more room to grow within its banks. Projections on Wednesday suggested that the river could rise high enough to cause water to seep onto adjacent farmland.

Bottom line: Just because it's stopped raining doesn't mean the flood concerns have evaporated. The National Weather Service's flood warning, which extends throughout much of the Central Valley, will carry on at least into Thursday.

The San Joaquin County Office of Emergency Services upgraded to a higher alert level on Wednesday, recommending that public agencies be ready to mobilize if a serious flood occurs.

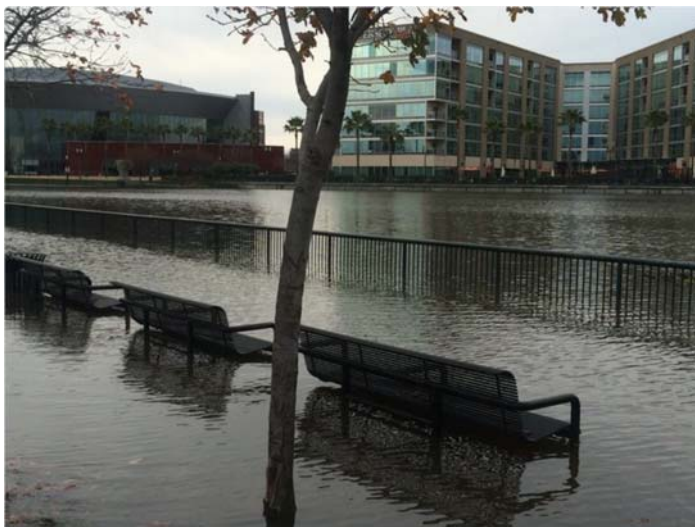
"There's enough potential," said Michael Cockrell, the local OES director. "In all four directions of the county, we see flood threats."

But before all that water can escape toward the bay, it must pass through the Delta, where there has been no major levee failure since the sunny-day **Jones Tract collapse in 2004**.

Potential threats include wind eroding the sides of the levees and beaver holes that can weaken their integrity, Nomellini said. A sinkhole discovered on Upper Jones Tract on Sunday has been filled and "looks like it's OK," he said.

Nomellini said the water levels in Rio Vista on Wednesday appeared to be about **10 inches higher than expected**. The tides, runoff from the mountains and barometric pressure are factors, making the actual water level hard to predict.

But it's not hard to see that the water has gone up progressively since the first major storm on Sunday. Each day, water has spilled higher onto the waterfront promenade in downtown Stockton; on Wednesday even the pedestrian benches were perched in a pool of water.



Mike Fitzgerald
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Rising water at Weber Point this evening.

5:33 PM - 11 Jan 2017

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Members of the California Conservation Corps were dispatched to Twitchell Island, south of Highway 12 in Sacramento County, to put plastic sheeting and sandbags over the levee to protect it from wind-whipped waves.

As Nomellini put it: "We're keeping our fingers crossed."

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East Bay Times

Bay Area flooding: Multiple Delta levee breaches reported



Courtesy John Sweeney - At least one home on Van Sickle Island in the Sacramento River delta was inundated by rising water on Thursday, Jan. 12, 2017. At least one instance of a levee breach was also reported as well as reports of water overtopping the levees.

By [Aaron Davis](#) | aarondavis@bayareanewsgroup.com and [Matthias Gafni](#) | mgafni@bayareanewsgroup.com |

PUBLISHED: **January 12, 2017** at 2:54 pm | UPDATED: January 13, 2017 at 3:48 am

VAN SICKLE ISLAND — After three days of king tides and massive rainfall, levees in the Delta have begun to fail, flooding islands, duck clubs and other land north of Pittsburg, an island owner and emergency official said Thursday.

Van Sickle and Grizzly islands, among others, have seen levees overtopped or breached, according to Don Ryan, Solano County Sheriff's Office emergency services manager. No injuries or evacuations have been reported, he said.

“This is mostly private property, often duck clubs ... and it's their responsibility to maintain their own levee system,” he said.

Ryan said the influx of water flowing down from Sacramento, with the rare opening of the Sacramento weir, combined with king tides has put pressure on the levees, causing many to rupture or have water pour over the top.

“The good thing is these are relatively unpopulated areas and the people who are there are duck club owners with boats, so they can get away,” Ryan said.

The water flow peaked early Thursday at the Sacramento weir at 140,000 cubic feet per second, according to the Department of Water Resources.

Delta island owner John Sweeney shared photos and video of breached levees and water from the Sacramento River topping over berms at Van Sickle Island, home to about 20 duck clubs.

He said one big breach spanned about 1,000 feet and he expected the entire island to flood in hours. He co-owns Spinner Island Hunt and Social Club.

“It will be flooded in about an hour,” Sweeney said in a phone interview from his boat about 2 p.m. Thursday.

Ryan said the water flow was slowing and tides are dropping, which should alleviate some of the flooding, but affected islands will have to pump water out which can take months.

At Big Break Regional Shoreline in Oakley, the confluence of king tide with the rushing waters flooded over the observation pier, which in turn brought a flood of visitors.

“We’ve had hundreds of people here today and a hundred yesterday. It’s like a snow day,” said Mike Moran, supervising naturalist at Big Break’s visitor center. “The last time the water was over the pier was 10 years ago.”

Waters climbed over the observation pier at Big Break Regional Shoreline and drew visitors to wade through the waters during the rare event. (Aaron Davis/Staff)

Moran explained to visitors that the sun and the moon were both at their closest points to Earth and were also in line, which created the king tide that was drawing over 450,000 gallons a second inland to meet the outflow from the Delta.

Park officials creatively provided rain boots at the entrance to the pier for guests to slog through the waters out to the observation deck.

Shaunika Dearman, of Brentwood, brought her three kids and dog out to the pier to see the rare event.

“We live in such an amazing place in terms of nature and waterways and we didn’t want to miss out on something that happens once in a blue moon,” Dearman said.

Tony Griffin, resident and host at the Antioch Marina, had not seen the water this deep in more than 50 years. A marker indicated the water was 6 feet above the average.

“It’s 2 feet deep in the parking lot here, and you can see the wake from the passing boats,” Griffin said.

Storms Put Dent in Drought but Not the Need to Restore California's Water Balance

Posted by : [CA Economic Summit](#) January 12, 2017

By John Guenther.

California's stormy deluge of rain is [altering the drought outlook](#), at least for the now-full reservoirs in the northern part of the state. But the need to provide a sustainable and reliable water supply will never be low in priority in the years ahead.

Even before the drought, Californians used almost 10 million acre-feet a year more from reservoirs and aquifers than was replenished by nature. Something has to give—and the state needs to make moves this year to more sustainably manage its water.

That's the call-to-action from Jay Ziegler, director of external affairs for [The Nature Conservancy](#) in California, who was featured in the Sacramento Bee this week with his op-ed "[California's water policy at potential tipping point](#)."

"But whether the drought is broken or not, Californians must act this year to achieve more sustainable long-term water management. California operates at a water deficit. Even in wet years, we use more surface and groundwater than is replenished by rainfall. It is not sustainable.

The recently enacted federal California drought bill and the arrival of a Trump administration will place additional pressure on California's ability to manage water for the benefit of all the things we care about including wildlife, agriculture and cities."

Ziegler cited recent progress such as the voter-approved \$7 billion water bond and reforms that finally put groundwater under the state's management responsibilities.

Moving forward, Ziegler listed additional steps to address California's management challenges, including improved water monitoring and developing water financing reforms to improve quality and to capture and recycle more stormwater.

Solutions like these will require more investment, smart planning, and increased use of technology. The California Economic Summit helped in the development of a [next generation of local infrastructure financing tools](#) and created a [detailed action plan](#) for integrating resource planning and ecosystem services tools, while promoting data technology to aid in planning.

One of the top priorities of the Summit throughout last year and at the 2016 Summit was promoting the [conservation, reuse, and capture](#) of one million more acre-feet of water each year for the next decade.

To achieve this goal, the Summit sought innovative approaches to integrating water management across watersheds—helping each region more efficiently capture and reuse each drop as it moves from mountains to the sea.

Even if 2017 spells the end of years of drought for California, the work to put the state's water systems in balance will continue.

[Originally posted at CA Economic Blog.](#)

All this recent rain won't stop California from sinking

By [Nathan Halverson](#) / January 14, 2017

The powerful storm that pounded California this week seemed like the break the state so desperately needed.

Unfortunately, it wasn't enough. In fact, there is probably no storm capable of washing away California's water woes, according to scientists.

The state simply is using too much water – even during wet years. As a result, thousands of miles of prime agricultural area in the Central Valley are sinking. Roads and bridges are cracking, threatening to cause \$1 billion in damage. Homeowners are watching their water supply dwindle.

“We're taking more out than we're putting back in,” said Michelle Sneed, a U.S. Geological Survey hydrologist in California. “You can't do that forever without running out.”



U.S. Geological Survey scientist Michelle Sneed shows where a farmer would have been standing in 1988, before a six-year drought triggered sinking in California's San Joaquin Valley. It also shows how sinking accelerated in 2008. Credit: U.S. Geological Survey

This alone isn't the drought's fault. The state's historically bad sinking predates the current drought by nearly a decade – maybe even longer, Sneed said.

The Central Valley's water problems instead are caused by a monumental shift in what farmers grow and how they get their water. Over the last 15 years, lettuce and wheat fields have given way to high-profit, water-intensive crops that are mostly exported to other countries.

Food exports from California have tripled in value during the last decade, according to an analysis of state crop reports by Reveal from The Center for Investigative Reporting. Exports now account for about \$1 in every \$3 farmers earn. And farmers continue to plant more orchards every year.

This is especially true of nut crops such as almonds and walnuts. Farmers are exporting nearly twice the volume of almonds compared with 10 years prior, according to the most recent crop reports.

The Central Valley often is cited as the most productive farmland in the world – producing half of the country’s fruits, nuts and vegetables. But its high output is threatened as water becomes increasingly scarce, especially as its groundwater levels fall. It is not alone.

Around the world, one-third of the planet’s major aquifers are being depleted, according to data from NASA. In the coming decades, water shortages are expected to reduce global food production by 350 million tons – equivalent to the entire U.S. grain harvest that includes rice, wheat and corn, according to the United Nations.

Eventually, maybe 22 percent of the California’s irrigated farmland – about 2 million acres – could be abandoned as a result of water problems, according to Jay Lund, an environmental engineering professor at the University of California, Davis. These farms provide more than a million jobs in the state, sustaining whole communities, and if the farming sector contracts, so do the livelihoods of the people.

The water depletion also is causing collateral damage to local families as farmers and other investors scramble to capitalize on the last remaining sources of water in the state.

Andrea and Milt Medeiros are worried the domestic well in their house will run dry after nearly a million almond trees were planted near their home outside Oakdale, in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada. The almond orchards replaced what had been mostly unirrigated pastureland.

“I just describe it as this, you know, this cancer that’s spreading all over,” said Andrea Medeiros, a longtime schoolteacher.

Since the almond orchard was planted, she says the water in their domestic well has been dropping. They’re worried it will go dry eventually, which has happened to thousands of other homes across the Central Valley.

“People are angry. You know we worked our whole life. If we lose our home for something that’s out of our control, what are we going to do, work another 34 years to get it back?” she said. “And that’s just crazy to feel like you’re being forced out of your home.”

Farmers in these parts haven’t always relied so heavily on underwater aquifers. Over the last two decades, governments began reducing their water supply from reservoirs and rivers just as farmers started switching to more water-intensive crops.

Government officials and scientists have grown increasingly concerned about the environmental impact of all the water being diverted from rivers. Most of it goes to farmers, who account for 80 percent of the state’s water use.

And the effects of overuse can be seen around the state. The San Joaquin River has run dry in the summer for about six decades now. This hurts the salmon that need it for spawning, and scientists blame the plummeting fish populations on overdrawing the rivers.

Farmers are not taking the reductions quietly.



The lining of the Delta-Mendota Canal near Dos Palos, Calif., is buckling because of sinking land. Californians are using too much water, causing the sinking of prime agricultural area in the Central Valley. Credit: Scott Smith/Associated Press

“We feel really strongly down in this area that our contracts with the government – you know, that was to be our water, and the government reneged on them,” said Stuart Woolf, one of the state’s largest nut farmers.

After returning from World War II, his father, Jack Woolf, moved to the Central Valley from Arizona, first working for another farming family before starting his own operation on the west side of the valley. He spent a lifetime expanding the business, receiving ample water from the government-managed canal system. The farm is the legacy he has left his children.

Stuart Woolf blames the government for mismanaging the public’s water and for caring more about fish than farmers.

In order to keep their nut orchards watered, farmers such as Stuart Woolf in the western San Joaquin Valley have tapped deep into the groundwater, chasing it to historic lows.

As water levels drop from 100 feet below the surface, down to 200 feet and even further to nearly 600 feet, the amount of electricity needed to pump up hundreds of millions of gallons of water is staggering. Last year, researchers determined that falling groundwater levels were costing farmers \$300 million a year.

It has created a vicious cycle in this part of the southern Central Valley. As farmers have lost access to surface water, they’ve tapped into more expensive groundwater. And to pay for it, they are growing more water-intensive crops.

“If you really contract and squeeze and you increase the costs of water, you may not be able to make it growing alfalfa or grain or cotton or a whole host of things that we grow in California,” Stuart Woolf said. “But you may still be able to grow almonds, pistachios, possibly wine grapes.”

East Bay Times

Guest Commentary: Level of fire protection inadequate

By [Bryan Scott](#) |

PUBLISHED: **January 15, 2017** at 8:14 pm | UPDATED: January 15, 2017 at 8:17 pm

Last month the Attorney General of Michigan, Bill Schuette, filed criminal charges against the appointed administrative managers of a water district charged with providing water to Flint, a city with nearly 100,000 residents.

An investigation has uncovered “a fixation on finances and balance sheets” that caused the deaths of 12 people, according to reports by the New York Times and the Associated Press.

Today the level of a specific type of government service in Eastern Contra Costa County, fire and emergency medical service, is woefully inadequate and causing loss of life and property. Fire and emergency medical services are every bit as essential to life as water.

“Discovery Bay has lost three residents to cardiac arrest because engines were unavailable to respond,” ECCFPD Captain Gil Guerrero told the Local Agency Formation Commission in May of last year.

With about 110,000 residents, the population served by ECCFPD is about the same size as the number of residents of the Flint water district. Both agencies are failing to provide adequate life sustaining services.

The criminal charges filed against the water district’s top managers carry penalties of up to 46 years in prison. The investigation of this public health crisis began last January.

Here in East County published comments by Joel Bryant, president of the ECCFPD Board and vice mayor of Brentwood, convey a lack of commitment to the public’s safety while paying close attention to budgets.

Within months the fire district will reduce the number of stations to just three. When talking about this imminent closure of the district’s fourth fire station and shifting government funding, Bryant said:

“It’s not in the budget to do so, and I don’t imagine that the will of the community would be there either until there are some devastating changes,” Bryant said. “To reallocate funds will mean reduction of services elsewhere ... and the residents have come to expect a certain level of quality of life that it will certainly impinge upon,” he was quoted as saying in the East Bay Times (Nov. 11, 2016).

So the question for East County residents is “How many people need to die?” before our local government changes where property tax money is allocated?

Michigan Attorney General Scheutte decided that 12 deaths were enough when he began his criminal investigation.

“This fixation has cost lives. This fixation came at the expense of protecting the health and safety of Flint. It’s all about numbers over people, money over health,” he said.

Are there any elected or appointed leaders in East County willing to accept a smaller number?

Fire and emergency medical services in East Contra Costa County are in a state of crisis. Below is an open letter to Contra Costa County District Attorney Mark A. Peterson, the county’s top law enforcement official. District Attorney Peterson was first elected to this role in 2011. He previously served on the Concord City Council for 15 years beginning in 1995, and was mayor three times.

Dear District Attorney Mark Peterson:

People are dying in East Contra Costa, and houses are burning down, because of inadequate funding of the East Contra Costa Fire Protection District.

Can you please investigate?

The nine members of the ECCFPD Board, appointed by the city councils of Brentwood and Oakley and the Contra Costa Board of Supervisors, are more concerned with budgets and balance sheets than they are with public safety.

Please, the public needs your help.

Bryan Scott of Brentwood

Bryan Scott is a Brentwood resident and Co-Chair of East County Voters for Equal Protection, a non-partisan citizens action committee whose aim is to improve funding for the ECCFPD. He can be reached at scott.bryan@comcast.net, or 925-418-4428. The group’s Facebook page is <https://www.facebook.com/EastCountyVoters/>.

East Bay Times

Kensington board moves to split police chief and general manager duties

The move would allow the chief to concentrate on the district's police officers and enable trustees to hire a general manager to focus on fiscal matters.



Kensington board moves to split police chief and general manager duties

By [Rick Radin](#) | Bay Area News Group
January 15, 2017 at 7:10 am

KENSINGTON – The town's police services district is moving ahead with creating separate positions for police chief and general manager, a role that up to now had been under one individual.

The move would allow the chief to concentrate on supervising the district's nine police officers and enable trustees to hire a general manager to focus on budgeting, contract negotiations and other fiscal matters.

The decision by the district's Board of Directors last week follows conflict of interest charges from some Kensington residents over the alleged hesitancy of former Police Chief/General Manager Greg Harman to investigate a scandal involving a district officer in a timely manner, as well as resolve reports of run-ins between officers and residents.

The district has had three people fill the police chief/general manager post, including one who lasted less than a month, since Harman was dismissed almost two years ago. The position is being filled on an interim basis by Rickey Hull, previously a master sergeant in the department who served as Harman's second-in-command.

Hull is receiving \$140,000 annually in base salary and the district board envisions the police chief making \$129,000 for that job alone, according to new board President Rachelle Sherris-Watt.

That leaves \$16,000 for the general manager position based on Harman's final pay of \$145,000, but a deficit could be made up by making the position part-time, not offering health benefits, and having the new general manager apply for grants and look for room in the budget for cuts, Sherris-Watt said.

"A good general manager should be able to take a good look at our budget and find their salary," she said. "We're going to try to do more with less."

Sherris-Watt said the next steps will involve developing a job description for the general manager position and searching for candidates.

"You have to imagine it's going to take a couple of months, two to three months," she said. "If it was faster, that would be great."

Chuck Toombs, who was defeated in his bid for a third term on the board in November, wrote in an e-mail that his views have "evolved" about creating two positions and he now favors the change with a couple of conditions.

Toombs wrote that residents should be aware of the potential for loss of services if one of the positions is part-time and that they should get a chance to debate the issue in a public town hall, announced well in advance, rather than a regular board meeting.

"I have not seen any publicity or news stories suggesting there will be a full town hall style discussion on this issue or explaining what this really means to the community or what it may cost, and that is troubling to me," Toombs wrote.

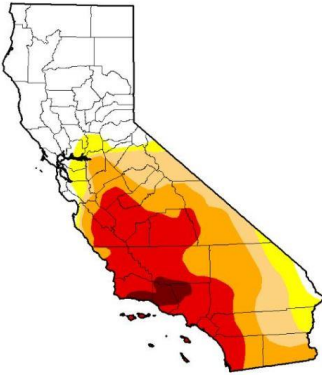
The board has also authorized Hull to negotiate with the Contra Costa County Sheriff's Office and Albany for record management system and computer assisted dispatch services that are now provided by Richmond on a contract that ends July 1.

"This involves keeping records and sending out officers on call," Sherris-Watt said. "It's very expensive to participate in the (Richmond) system."

California drought continues to shrink, federal government says

By [Paul Rogers](#) | progers@bayareanewsgroup.com |

PUBLISHED: **January 19, 2017** at 6:21 am | UPDATED: January 19, 2017 at 9:07 am



Due to ongoing rain, 44 percent of California is now in severe drought, down from 49 percent a week ago, while 42 percent is out of drought entirely. NOAA, USDA, University of Nebraska

With major reservoirs nearly full, the Sierra Nevada snowpack well above average and flood warnings in place for some rivers, federal scientists reported Thursday a continued weakening of California's drought.

Overall, 44 percent of the state remains in severe drought conditions or worse, down from 49 percent a week ago, according to [the U.S. Drought Monitor](#), a weekly study by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The improved area, roughly 5.1 million acres, is mostly in the central Sierra Nevada, which has been hit with major snowstorms in recent weeks.

A year ago this week, the same report found 86 percent of California was in severe drought or worse.

Yet a stark difference remains between Northern and Southern California: 42 percent of the state is out of the drought entirely, the same percentage as last week. The areas no longer in a drought include nearly all of Northern California roughly from the Bay Area to Oregon.

Through next Monday night, however, between 9 to 13 inches of new precipitation is forecast to fall on coastal California and much of the Sierras, the report noted.

“These anticipated areas of heavy precipitation are likely to result in additional improvements to next week's U.S. Drought Monitor depiction,” wrote Richard Tinker and Anthony Artusa, two meteorologists with NOAA who compiled Thursday's report.

Despite some recent storms, Southern California and the San Joaquin Valley have not seen anywhere near the volume of moisture as the north has this winter or last, and continue to suffer from significant drought conditions, the report said.

Each week, the scientists who write the drought monitor assign six levels of drought intensity: no drought, abnormally dry, moderate drought, severe drought, extreme drought and exceptional drought. They analyze soil moisture, stream levels, rainfall totals, snow pack, reservoir levels and other measurements in all 50 states, along with reported observations from more than 350 expert contributors around the country.

About 24 percent of California, including San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Ventura, Los Angeles, Orange and western San Diego counties, along with much of the San Joaquin Valley, are still classified as being in “extreme” drought, down from 28 percent last week and 68 percent a year ago. About 2 percent is in “exceptional drought,” the worst category, down from 42 percent a year ago.

California officials, while acknowledging the dramatic improvements in the northern part of the state, continue to focus on those areas that are still struggling. They have said in recent weeks that Gov. Jerry Brown may rescind, or regionalize, the statewide drought emergency declaration he issued in January 2014, but not until at least April after the winter storm season is over in case the wet weather ends.

“Our water supply outlook is definitely brighter, but we still haven’t shaken off the effects of our historic drought,” said William Croyle, acting director of the state Department of Water Resources, on Wednesday afternoon.

California’s two biggest reservoirs, Shasta and Oroville, are now 80 percent full and releasing water to keep space for flood control. Many Bay Area reservoirs are 100 percent full. Croyle noted, however, that some reservoirs, such as Lake Cachuma, which is Santa Barbara’s main water supply and sits at just 9 percent full, remain low, while some communities, such as East Porterville, near Bakersfield, continue to provide bottled water to people whose wells ran dry.

“We know from painful history that California winters can go quickly from very wet to very dry,” Croyle added. “We want to see the snowpack continue to build for the remainder of the wet season.”

Top water industry officials are increasingly pushing back on the ‘glass half-empty’ message, however. They say that the state should let its emergency drought rules expire next month, lest it lose the trust of residents who have watched rivers brimming, reservoirs spilling and ski resorts buried in blizzards. They note that full reservoirs in the north mean more supply also in the south, since much of the south’s water supply comes from the north.

“Water supply conditions have improved dramatically, and the public can readily see that,” said Tim Quinn, executive director of the Association of California Water Agencies, a group representing the more than 400 local water departments. “Continuing the message that we remain in a drought emergency strains our credibility at this point.”

The statewide Sierra snowpack, the source of one-third of California's water supply, stood at 163 percent of the historic average Thursday, up from just 64 percent on New Year's Day, and already 82 percent of the April 1 average. Two years ago, in April 2015, it was at 5 percent of average.

And the storms keep coming.

As of Wednesday night, San Jose was at 110 percent of its historic average rainfall for this time of year, San Francisco at 131, Oakland at 132, Sacramento 206, Eureka 161, Fresno 181 and Los Angeles 149. After heavy rain Wednesday night that downed trees, caused power outages, snarled traffic and prompted the National Weather Service to issue flood advisories across the Bay Area, two new storm systems were expected to pound much of California on Friday and Sunday.

“Rainfall, and especially, snowfall, of this magnitude has not been seen in California since before the start of our severe multi-year drought,” in 2011, wrote Daniel Swain, a climate researcher at UCLA, on his blog ‘Weather West’ on Tuesday. “Unsurprisingly, this recent precipitation has brought considerable drought relief to the northern two thirds of the state.”

Even as state officials urged caution, they announced Wednesday that cities and farms will receive at least 60 percent of the maximum amount of water they are contracted to buy in the coming year from the State Water Project, up from just 20 percent two months ago. Built in the 1960s by former Gov. Pat Brown, the project is a vast system of canals and dams that moves water 700 miles from Northern California to cities from San Jose to San Diego, providing water to 23 million people, along with farmers in the Central Valley. The department said that given the weather pattern so far this winter, it hopes to further boost deliveries — already the highest since 65 percent of contracted amounts were delivered in 2012 — in the coming months.

Meanwhile, at a public hearing Wednesday, state officials announced plans to keep in place scaled-down water conservation rules for urban residents that they imposed last May. The State Water Resources Control Board will make a final decision on the rules Feb. 7, but said Tuesday that it wants to wait three more months to see the final outcome of the winter weather before lifting all water conservation targets for cities.

Last summer, after normal rains fell on Northern California over the winter, the state dropped mandatory conservation targets for cities that had led many communities to limit lawn watering, and issue fines and penalties for overuse. Instead, the water board, appointed by the governor, shifted to a system in which each of California's 411 largest cities, water companies and water districts is allowed to set its own conservation target based on its local supplies and demands. As a result, 80 percent of the local agencies, including most Bay Area cities, gave themselves no target and eased up on local drought restrictions, helping them sell more water and boosting their bottom lines.

East Bay Times

DeNova Homes project

Pine Meadow plan moves forward

Property owners win appeal for homes on former golf course site

By Dana Guzzetti

Correspondent

January 25, 2017

MARTINEZ — Pine Meadow Golf Course owners won an appeal to the City Council, allowing the DeNova Homes plan to build 98 residences on the 25.9 acres at 451 Vine Hill Way to proceed in the application process.

The council's 4-1 vote ended a hard-fought battle over the existing golf course open space/recreational zoning that prohibits residential development. There were raw feelings on both sides of the issue. Homeowners adjacent to the golf course bought there expecting to see the natural setting retained because of the zoning. With development, they worried about wildlife, overcrowded schools, and traffic. Property owner Christine Coward Dean rhetorically asked, "Is there any such thing as privately owned permanent open space?"

Dean and other family members inherited the golf course from her father and sold a majority ownership to a DeNova Homes affiliate Civic Martinez, LLC. Dean said she has been contesting the zoning designation since she found out about it nine years ago. The city staff had denied DeNova's development plan application because it did not ask for a general plan and zoning change.

Councilwoman Lara DeLaney backed the staff reasoning that the plan could not be approved with the existing zoning in place, and voted "no" at the Jan. 18 meeting that ended at 1:37 a.m.

Jim Reese, the city's special adviser on the project, had given the council a 12page timeline with documentation to support the need for a zoning change as part of the residential development application.

In a lengthy, emotional appeal to each council member individually, Dean recounted her failed attempts to sell the land to the city and asked them to "do the right thing."

Dean said the legality of the existing open space/ residential designation is questionable and city denial of the project amounts to a violation of private property rights without the use of eminent domain.

DeNova's attorney Dana Tsubota echoed that and said denial of the project is contrary to regional and local residential infill policies. Her 106-page PowerPoint presentation to the standing room only audience was based on research of documents she and other lawyers had been able to obtain.

Tsubota challenged the validity of city paperwork surrounding the handwritten open space/recreational designation on a 1973 map, and noted that a newer 1976 map did not match a general plan existing at that time.

She said a 1974 council zoning resolution was unsigned and buttressed those arguments with declarations from former Mayor John Sparacino, other developers and Christine Dean's assertion that, "No unaltered map is available."

The city staff does not have an updated general plan with matching zoning revisions to support those documents. Reese acknowledged that Tsubota's presentation showed 1970s planning practices were not as defined, and they were not aligned with contemporary planning policies, but he defended the zoning.

He said the history of events and civic decisions, such as the denial of a Busby residential development proposal two years after the golf course property was annexed to Martinez demonstrate city's intent, support the documents, and public's 40-year belief that a park-like setting would remain there.

The council majority explained their votes this way at about 11:30 p.m.:

- The property is close to Hidden Lakes, a large existing park
- Voters have turned down the opportunity to buy the land and there is no money in the budget for it
- Alternate undeveloped open space property is available for purchase at Alhambra Highlands
- Surrounded by residential development, Pine Meadow perfectly fits infill policy.

The property owners insisted on receipt of an official written resolution at that time, so the meeting continued on until the city attorney could write one.



Golfers walk the course on the last day of operation at Pine Meadow Golf Course in Martinez in 2015.

Water Education Foundation

Climate Change Impacts Here to Stay for California Farmers, Grower Says



[Russ Lester, co-owner of Dixon Ridge Farms](#)

California agriculture is going to have to learn to live with the impacts of climate change and work toward reducing its contributions of greenhouse gas emissions, a Yolo County walnut grower said at the Jan. 26 California Climate Change Symposium in Sacramento.

“I don’t believe we are going to be able to adapt our way out of climate change,” said Russ Lester, co-owner of Dixon Ridge Farms in Winters. “We need to mitigate for it. It won’t solve the problem but it can slow it down.”

Lester, who grows walnuts on 600 acres, said he prefers the term “climate weirdness” to climate change. He said increased groundwater storage and flood water capture are key to ensuring that the state’s multibillion-dollar agriculture industry stays productive even with warming temperatures and less snow.

“We farm in a very narrow frame of weather patterns,” Lester said. “Farmers fear spikes more than averages.”

As an example, Lester pointed to his operation, where warmer temperatures have a direct impact on crop quality. Temperatures of 90 degrees Fahrenheit during the blooming period in April can eliminate 30 percent of the walnut crop, he said.

While he thinks that groundwater storage is a strategy to cope with climate change, Lester is not as keen on building surface water storage. Lester said it has limited benefit because it’s expensive, all of the good sites have been taken and there is too high of an evaporative loss, which can reach as much as 30 percent. There have been calls to bioengineer crops to withstand climate change but that “can only do so much” and science “can’t breed for extremes,” Lester said.

Instead, farmers have to improve their stewardship of the soil while actively reducing their greenhouse gas emissions. Lester said Dixon Ridge Farms became 100 percent carbon-neutral through the use of renewable energy solar and walnut husks that are used to power a biogas

generator to power his walnut-processing operation in 2012 after five years of planning. He said he believes the agricultural sector can meet the goals of California's greenhouse gas emissions reduction law "easily in a short time frame."

Ultimately, the projected climate change impacts will affect California's farming industry.

"I don't think we will be able to grow some of the crops we are currently growing," Lester said.

East Bay Times

Greenbelt Alliance report for Bay Area

Despite gains, much land at risk of sprawl

Region must balance desire for open space with need for more affordable housing

By Paul Rogers

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Nearly 300,000 acres across the Bay Area — an area 10 times the size of San Francisco — remain at risk of sprawl development, according to a new report released Tuesday, despite the region's momentous gains over the past 30 years of preserving parks and open space.

Contra Costa, Sonoma and Santa Clara counties have the most land potentially facing bulldozers, said the Greenbelt Alliance, a San Francisco-based environmental group that conducts the most comprehensive survey of development patterns in the Bay Area every five years.



New homes in the Wallis Ranch development sit in the mostly unbuilt Tassajara Valley region of Dublin.

“We should be proud of what we’ve accomplished in the Bay Area,” said Jeremy Madsen, CEO of the Greenbelt Alliance. “But there’s still a lot of work to do.”

With the Bay Area a major jobs engine that brings in more people every year, most cities have not kept pace with housing needs, causing developers and some environmental groups to call for streamlining rules to make it easier to build within existing urban areas.

From the Marin headlands to Mount Diablo to Henry Coe State Park, the Bay Area arguably has the most protected open space of any major metropolitan region in the United States.

Of 4.4 million total acres in the Bay Area, the report found:

- 27 percent is permanently protected in national parks, state parks, local parks, wildlife refuges and open space preserves, the legacy of more than 100 years of conservation work.
- 48 percent is classified as “low risk,” land where zoning allows only farms or ranches, limits building on hillsides or where development is blocked by urban growth boundaries.
- Another 18 percent is urban.

- And the remaining 7 percent is open land “at risk” of development in the next 30 years. Of that, about 1 percent is “high risk,” meaning development could occur in the next 10 years.

Areas in the highest risk category include cattle ranches outside Brentwood, Antioch and Oakley in Contra Costa County; the Coyote Valley in South San Jose; and the Cargill salt ponds in Redwood City, where a developer has proposed building 12,000 houses in a project that faces stiff opposition.

Development groups say that building rules have become too strict overall and have led to some of the highest housing prices in the nation.

“One of the byproducts is the housing shortage,” said Lisa Vorderbrueggen, a spokeswoman for the Building Industry Association of the Bay Area, based in Walnut Creek. “We’re not advocating paving over parks, but there has to be a better balance.”

Large sections filled

In the 1950s and 1960s, city leaders around the Bay Area regularly approved filling large sections of San Francisco Bay for developments like Foster City. They paved tens of thousands of acres of orchards for massive subdivisions and built freeways through ranchlands.

But in the last two generations, parks and open space advocates have held the upper hand, winning nearly every major development battle.

In 1989, the first year the Greenbelt Alliance conducted its five-year report, it classified 781,100 acres as “at risk,” a number that has fallen by 63 percent today. That drop didn’t come because most of the land was paved over. The amount of urban land in the Bay Area grew by only 7 percent since 1989, according to the Greenbelt Alliance’s reports.

Rather, there was a huge expansion in the size and number of parks and open space preserves. Since 1989, the amount of permanently protected land in the Bay Area grew by 68 percent — nearly half a million acres — to the current 1.2 million acres.

“One of the big things that makes the Bay Area special is that this is a place where you can go to work and be up in the hills in 30 minutes to be hiking in some place that feels truly wild,” said Madsen. “It’s a quality-of-life issue. We have the opportunity to be on the coast, and in redwood forests, and places that feel nonurban right in our backyard.”

Voters have repeatedly passed parks bonds, parks taxes and other tools at the ballot, often with the endorsement of business groups like the Silicon Valley Leadership Group.

In November, voters approved a \$12 parcel tax for all nine Bay Area counties to raise \$500 million to buy wetlands and fund flood control work around the shoreline of San Francisco Bay. Two years earlier, 71 percent of voters in Alameda and Contra Costa counties approved a \$500 million bond measure for the East Bay Regional Park District, and voters by a similar majority approved \$300 million in bonds for the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District and a \$24 annual parcel tax for the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority.

Increasingly, open space groups are now agreeing with development groups that more apartments and condominiums need to be built within city limits.

But many cities, from Walnut Creek to Palo Alto, have seen dense, in-fill development plans die over “not in my backyard” neighborhood opposition. Last year, Gov. Jerry Brown floated a plan

to streamline approvals for developers who built housing within existing city limits. But it died after environmental groups like the Natural Resources Defense Council opposed it as a rollback of CEQA, the law that requires environmental impact statements of traffic, air pollution, noise and other concerns. And union groups such as the California Labor Federation that wanted prevailing wage, or union wages, required on such projects also opposed it.

“The state needs to basically tell communities you are going to have to give up some of your local control for the greater good,” said Vorderbrueggen of the building industry association. “Otherwise, more people are going to be driving two hours to work each way so they can find a house they can afford, and people’s kids and grandkids won’t be able to afford to live here.”

“One of the byproducts (of strict rules for development) is the housing shortage. We’re not advocating paving over parks, but there has to be a better balance.”

— *Lisa Vorderbrueggen, Building Industry Association of the Bay Area*