Letter on Hogan drought years

by L. Whitney, December 8, 2005

My sole purpose is to inform the newer residents in the Valley Springs area about potential low-water levels in New Hogan Lake during drought periods. It is not my intention to disparage CCWD or any other agency. With current high lake levels, it is easy to dismiss or forget about drought situations.

As the Valley Springs area continues to grow the issue of water availability needs to be addressed. Is there enough water to adequately supply the current population as well as all of the development in the works, and future development?

CCWD does not have any water rights to New Hogan Lake. The US Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) holds water rights to New Hogan. SEWD (Stockton East Water District) in partnership with CCWD contracts with the USBR for an average of 84,100 acre-feet (af) per year from New Hogan. According to Kevin Kauffman, GM of SEWD, during an average year CCWD's share of water from New Hogan is approximately 31,000 af. Currently, CCWD uses about 3,500 to 4,000 af per year. One acre-foot is about 326,000 gallons, or enough water to supply two typical families for a year, which means that 4,000 af would serve approximately 8,000 households with water for one year. SEWD, depending on their demand, will use either part or all of CCWD's unused portion of water. According to CCWD staff, SEWD is the Water Master for Hogan (the responsible party for delivering water to CCWD).

For the vast majority of us living in Rancho Calaveras and La Contenta, our main source of water comes from New Hogan. We do have a back-up water source—Valley Springs Public Utility District; however "The district has been down to one well for many months and at one point relied on the Calaveras County Water District to provide back-up water supply" (The Valley Springs News, Fri. Dec. 2, 2005.) During California's last big multi-year drought, a six year period between 1987-92, Hogan, which has a storage capacity of 317,000 af, was below the USBR contract of 84,100 af for 65 months out of 72. In fact, there were a total of seven months during this time when the level of Hogan was in the 15,000 af range. In November 1988, Hogan at its lowest point contained only 14,933 af. This low level between 15,000-68 af is considered Dead Pool storage. This water can be used, but it is not preferable because there are problems of water quality; and the treatment plant has to work harder to treat Dead Pool water due to large amounts of sediment. Since SEWD is the Water Master for Hogan, they decide on Dam operations. They have a larger customer base than CCWD. Who do you think will take the lion's share of the available water during drought periods?

Certainly, California is not always in a drought situation, but they do occur periodically, and planning for drought situations must be a priority when planning for any future development in the Valley Springs and surrounding areas. CCWD's own website states, ". . .the Golden State is prone to frequent bouts [of] drought. . ." Currently, two bills, SB 610 and SB 221, require proof of available water supply for proposed developments. For developments of 500 units (homes) or more a WSA (water supply assessment) must be prepared in order to identify if a water district can meet adequate supply during a drought. The majority of proposed developments in the area are well under 500 units, but cumulatively they add up to more than that!

Another important consideration is all of the proposed development in the Wallace area: “When all possible developments for that area are tabulated, it could come to 1,000 new homes at final build-out” (Calaveras Enterprise, “Relief on tap for area’s thirsty water agencies?” Nov. 15). There is no doubt that the people in the Wallace and Burson areas need water, especially the people that are currently hauling in their own water. There is presently a water project being discussed by local water agencies on how to do that. I’m concerned, however, with Phase II of the water project which “calls for running a line from CCWD’s Jenny Lind Water Treatment Plant to the Camanche facility.” That is potentially a lot of thirsty customers using water from Hogan, especially during a drought period.

The populations of Rancho Calaveras and La Contenta have increased dramatically since the last drought. With the current population, do we have enough water to supply us in the next drought situation? Do we have enough water to supply future population growth in the Valley Springs area? Do we want Hogan water being diverted to Wallace for future developments and thirsty developers? This is another important and complex topic that is relevant to the current development issue facing us all, and we need to think about it and voice our opinion!

Note: You can go to the following website http://cdec.water.ca.gov/selectQuery.html, type in NHG in the Station ID box, click Get Data, and access New Hogan reservoir storage amounts monthly since 1963. You can also access data on Camanche Reservoir (CMN). In late 1988 storage levels were at an all time low of just under 10,000 af.