

SLOWED TO A TRICKLE

S.J. OFFICIALS RESTRICTING FLOWS FROM CALAVERAS RIVER IN CASE OF EMERGENCY



The old dam can be seen Wednesday at New Hogan Reservoir. Outflow into the Calaveras River has been reduced to 10 cubic feet per second to preserve storage in New Hogan.

CRAIG SANDERS/The Record



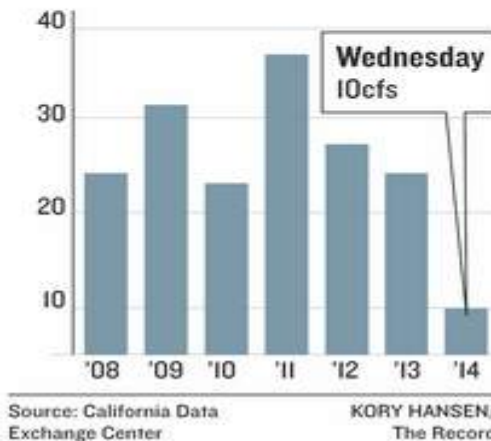
The Calaveras River is just one of many streams in California running low because of the drought.

CRAIG SANDERS/The Record

Low flow

Flows on the Calaveras River below New Hogan Lake have been cut to 10 cubic feet per second, the lowest the river has been since the late 1990s.

Cubic feet per second
on Feb. 19 of each year



By **Alex Breitler**
February 20, 2014
Record Staff Writer

In yet another reminder of these dry times, flows in the Calaveras River below New Hogan Lake have been reduced to the lowest level since the late 1990s.

The Stockton East Water District earlier this month cut releases from New Hogan to a mere 10 cubic feet per second.

Imagine a large wheelbarrow filled with water. That's about how much is flowing downstream every second.

It's February, and the demand for water on the east side of San Joaquin County remains low, so officials are holding back as much water in the reservoir as they can - for next year, if not this one.

"We're trying to create an emergency supply for 2015," eastside grower and Stockton East board member Tom McGurk said Wednesday.

While growers don't need the river water quite yet, fish might. The National Marine Fisheries Service asked Stockton East to survey the stream to make sure young fish, notably threatened steelhead, are not getting trapped in low pools as a result of the lower-than-normal flows.

Doug Demko, a fish biologist who consults for Stockton East, said Wednesday no stranded fish were located during two days of surveying last week.

The Calaveras is a small stream even in normal years, typically carrying no more than 20 or 30 cfs at this time of year.

For perspective, however, the river climbed to nearly 7,000 cfs amid flood concerns just three years ago.

So much has changed.

The Calaveras is one of many California streams running low. State officials have indicated there will not be enough water in reservoirs to flush out the Delta and keep it fresh, Stockton water attorney Dante Nomellini said Wednesday.

That could plague farmers in the Delta later this summer. They might be pumping "ocean water," Nomellini said.

Stockton officials have said the city should have enough to drink this summer, though there's no official word yet on whether Stockton will receive the water it normally draws from the Calaveras. Right now, Stockton East's water treatment plant is processing flows diverted from the Stanislaus River, farther south.

For farmers, walnut trees are still dormant, keeping demand for Calaveras River water low, McGurk said. Also, the ground is still somewhat moist from recent rains, he said.

Flows will increase once demand does, he said.

On Wednesday, near the gravel parking lot at the River of Skulls trailhead below New Hogan Dam, longtime fisherman Ken Thatcher stood on a bridge over the diminished Calaveras.

He saw a couple of steelhead, including one that appeared to be pushing 2 feet long, lurking in the shallows.

While some pools of water appeared to have been cut off from the main stream as a result of flow reductions, these fish were safely in the middle of the channel.

Thatcher was alone on the bridge - again, a reminder of these dry times.

"You get 15, 20 cars out here when the fishing is good," he said.

Contact reporter Alex Breitler at (209) 546-8295 or abreitler@recordnet.com. Follow him at recordnet.com/breitlerblog and on Twitter @alexbreitler.