



ULARA

UPPER LOS ANGELES RIVER AREA WATERMASTER

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**REPORT OF ULARA WATERMASTER
VIRTUAL STATUS CONFERENCE of JUNE 22, 2023
SUPERIOR COURT, DEPARTMENT 52
HONORABLE ARMEN TAMZARIAN**

A. Current Events in ULARA

1. The California High-Speed Rail (HSR) proposed project alignment passes through ULARA, including the Burbank area of the San Fernando Basin, the largest of the four ULARA groundwater basins. The Watermaster's office reviewed a second Draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (DEIR) for the California High-Speed Rail (HSR) Burbank to Palmdale Project Section, and submitted comments on December 1, 2022, during the public review period. As described in the DEIR, dewatering activities will occur within a portion of ULARA as part of the construction of the rail line. The Watermaster comment letter advised the document preparers that all extractions of groundwater from anywhere within the ULARA boundaries must be reported to the ULARA Watermaster, and requested that the ULARA Watermaster reporting requirements be incorporated into final versions of the Environmental documentation.

The Watermaster previously submitted similar comments in 2021 on the first published DEIR for the HSR that covered the Burbank to Los Angeles portion of the rail alignment. Other Parties submitted comments on that DEIR, as well. As an example, the City of Burbank noted that the proposed HSR alignment would require one or more of the wells used for groundwater cleanup activities to be moved. Relocation of the well(s) would prevent groundwater pumping from occurring during the construction and permitting processes for the new well(s), thus reducing the volume of groundwater and the amount of contaminants that would be pumped and removed, which might possibly be in conflict with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) groundwater cleanup requirements for the Burbank Operable Unit (BOU). Also, the State Division of Drinking Water (DDW) intimates that relocation of the well(s) opens the BOU to a new permit process (Policy 97-005). Groundwater cleanup operations could be reduced and/or shut down completely until the BOU is deemed in compliance with the Policy 97-005 permit requirements.

2. Due to the historic rainfall that occurred in the region during the current 2022-23 water year (WY), stormwater spreading operations have been ongoing in the various spreading basins in ULARA. Spreading of captured stormwater at the Hansen Spreading Grounds caused a high-water level alarm in monitoring wells associated with the historic Bradley Landfill (now a closed landfill operated by Water Management, Inc.). These monitoring wells were constructed to serve as an early warning to prevent groundwater in the basin from coming in contact with waste materials in the closed landfill.



In early-April 2023, the Watermaster was contacted by Waste Management in response to a pre-determined water level alert depth that was reached in one of the key Bradley Landfill monitoring wells. Since Mr. Slade's appointment as Watermaster in 2009, a similar high water level alarm has only occurred once, and at that time it was a false alarm due to malfunctioning measuring equipment.

The Watermaster convened an ongoing series of meetings of necessary parties, including staff from: Water Management the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works; the City of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power; and Waste Management. As a result of the meetings, the spreading of stormwater was temporarily halted in order to assess the situation and determine next steps. Groundwater was successfully prevented from coming into contact with the landfill refuse by these actions. Meetings were held weekly, and monitoring level monitoring by Waste Management was increased to daily measurements. Two weeks later, in early-May, stormwater spreading resumed and is expected to continue into the summer, and groundwater levels will continue to be closely monitored. No exceedance of the alert water level has occurred since the initial notification.

B. Status of Annual Reports

1. The ULARA Parties recently resolved a key issue that caused a delay in the issuance of multiple prior Annual ULARA Watermaster Reports. Based on the results of the agreement, the Watermaster is in the process of finalizing the Annual Watermaster Reports for Water Year (WY) 2018-19, WY 2019-20, and WY 2020-21. Once complete and approved by the Administrative Committee, the reports will be dated December 2020, December 2021, and December 2022, respectively. These documents are expected to be submitted to Court, published on the ULARA Website, and uploaded to the State Department of Water Resources (DWR) Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) website no later than October 2023.
2. The Watermaster is in the process of receiving the necessary data from all reporting Parties and is working to prepare the Annual Report for WY 2021-22. A Draft of this WY 2022-23 Annual Report is expected to be available for review by the Parties in December 2023, dependent upon receipt of necessary data, and pending ULARA AC approval, will be provided to the Court in early-2024.
3. Preparation of the Annual Groundwater Pumping and Spreading Plans for WYs 2018-19 through 2022-23 and subsequent reports are also in progress, and will be published following the acceptance of the Annual ULARA Watermaster Reports described above.

C. Ongoing Watermaster Activities

1. The Watermaster continues to maintain liaison with the State Department of Water Resources (DWR) Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) managers to help verify that ULARA maintains its compliance with SGMA. An annual Adjudicated Basins



Reporting meeting that typically occurs was cancelled in 2022 due to COVID-19 disruptions, and has not yet been scheduled for 2023 by DWR

2. The Watermaster continues to maintain compliance with DWR on its California Statewide Groundwater Elevation Monitoring program (known as CASGEM) for the four groundwater basins within ULARA. Data from the ULARA AC Parties for their Fall 2022 water level measurements were uploaded to the CASGEM system in October and November 2022. Data for Spring 2023 are being processed now and will be uploaded to the system by June 30, 2022. DWR also recently requested an update to the CASGEM monitoring Plan for ULARA to address inconsistencies between the monitoring wells in the existing monitoring plan and those identified in the CASGEM Online System. These changes occurred due to well failure and access issues that required well substitutions. The Watermaster expects that a revised Monitoring Plan will be submitted to DWR for review and acceptance by December 2023.
3. The Watermaster has continued to review and either approve or deny, based on site-specific conditions, the Low Impact Development (LID) projects within the City of Los Angeles portions of ULARA (i.e., the San Fernando & Sylmar basins).
4. Grant funding available from State and Local Agencies for water utility projects often require letters of support by Groundwater Basin Managers, Administrators, and Watermasters. The ULARA Watermaster has received a number of such requests in 2022 and 2023, and to date has provided letters of support for those projects in ULARA.

D. Salt & Nutrient Management Plan (SNMP)

The Watermaster is nearing completion of work on the SNMP for the four groundwater basins within ULARA. This project has basically involved an assessment and proposed management of possible changes in concentration trends over time in total dissolved solids, nitrate (as NO₃), and chloride in the ULARA groundwater basins, as a result of the use of recycled water for various projects. As part of the SNMP process, five Technical Memoranda have been distributed to date for public review. The published Technical Memoranda can be accessed by the public by visiting www.ULARAwatermaster.com/SNMP. The Watermaster is working with RWQCB-LA staff to finalize the necessary antidegradation analysis required as part of the SNMP.

E. ULARA “Policies and Procedures”

The original ULARA Watermaster prepared the first “Policies and Procedures” document in July 1987. Second and Third Updates to the document were subsequently prepared by that Watermaster, and were dated July 1993 and February 1998, respectively. The basic purposes of the “Policies and Procedures” document are: to provide a summary of the decreed extraction rights of the various parties to the Court-adjudicated ULARA region; to discuss the overall management of groundwater; and to state the basic rules for the activities of the Watermaster and the Administrative Committee. The Watermaster (in conjunction with the Administrative Committee) is preparing an update to the most current “Policies and Procedures” document for ULARA. Most recently, the Watermaster has met with LADWP to review paper copies of historic



documents stored in the Watermaster Library. Key files will be cataloged as part of the Policies and Procedures document to help future Watermasters understand decisions made over time.