



**ULARA**

UPPER LOS ANGELES RIVER AREA WATERMASTER

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**REPORT OF ULARA WATERMASTER  
VIRTUAL STATUS CONFERENCE of APRIL 4, 2025  
SUPERIOR COURT, DEPARTMENT 52  
HONORABLE ARMEN TAMZARIAN**

**A. Current Events in ULARA**

1. On October 29, 2024, the ULARA Watermaster's Special Council, Best Best & Krieger withdrew as counsel to the ULARA Watermaster due to potential conflicts. Since that withdrawal, the ULARA Administrative Committee (AC) has begun the process of selecting a new special Counsel. Due to contracting rules of the various ULARA AC Party agencies, a formal Request For Proposals (RFP) process will be required to fill the position. The AC is currently working to prepare the necessary documents for the RFP.
2. Numerous personnel changes have occurred at a number of the ULARA AC Member Agencies, and within agencies that are not AC members, but they continue to report necessary data to the Watermaster for the purposes of Annual Reporting. Richard Slade (Watermaster) and Anthony Hicke (Assistant Watermaster) have attended meetings with these individuals new to ULARA to provide a background on ULARA, discuss the function of the AC, and answer any general questions about the local groundwater basins or the Watermaster's work. The Watermaster is also working with these Parties to receive the data necessary to complete the Annual ULARA Watermaster Report.
3. Over the last six months or so, the ULARA Website (ULARAwatermaster.com) has had an issue displaying properly on some web browsers. This malfunction is likely due to an outdated web development platform; the website development company is no longer in business. Multiple attempts at a fix were made, with varying results; recently, the website is no longer displaying correctly on any browser. The Watermaster's office has engaged the services of a web developer to repair the website as soon as possible. Previously distributed web links for data download (such as those provided to the Court for report distribution) are still functional at this time. Those links will likely not be functional once the website is repaired and migrated to a new web hosting platform.
4. Monitoring of groundwater levels beneath the historic Bradley Landfill in the northeast portion of the San Fernando Valley (now a closed landfill operated by Waste Management, Inc.) is performed regularly by the property owner and their consultants. Natural groundwater recharge and the spreading of captured stormwater at the nearby Hansen Spreading Grounds can cause groundwater level to rise in the region. Measurement of water level in the wells is performed to serve as an early warning to prevent rising groundwater in the basin from potentially coming in contact with the bottom of the waste materials in the closed landfill.

Due to the historic rainfall that occurred in the region during the recent 2022-23 water year (WY), a water level alert level was reached. At the time, there was no clear definition of protocol in how to respond to the high water level alarm because such an event is an infrequent occurrence. (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). A working group was convened by the Watermaster which included staff from Waste Management, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works, the City of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, and others. The working group addressed the exceedances, and the groundwater level did not contact the landfill materials. Also, as a result of the meetings, Waste Management agreed to prepare a “Bradley Landfill Water Level Alert Monitoring Process” document that provides contact information and protocol for future exceedance. That document was completed and distributed to the ULARA Administrative Committee and other necessary parties in late October 2024. In addition, as described in the document, the ULARA Watermaster will be contacted by Waste Management every October to update the contact list.

5. 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 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 subterranean 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 Final EIR/EIS was made available to the public on May 24, 2024, and included changes that reflected the comments submitted

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 water 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 number 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.

Recently, representatives of HSR have not been attending the quarterly EPA coordination meeting to provide updates on the project. Hence, the current status of the Palmdale to Burbank Project and the Burbank to Los Angeles Project is unknown, aside from information published on the HSR website (<https://meethrsocal.org/>).



## **B. Status of Annual Reports**

1. The Watermaster is in the process of receiving the necessary data from all reporting Parties and is working to prepare the Annual Reports for Water Year (WY) 2021-22, WY 2022-23, and WY 2023-2024. A Draft of these Annual Reports is expected to be available for review by the Parties in December 2025, dependent upon receipt of necessary data, and pending ULARA AC approval. Beginning with the WY 2021-2022 report, the Annual Groundwater Pumping and Spreading Plan will be integrated into the Annual Report. This will help expedite publication of necessary reporting for ULARA.

## **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 occurred in May 2024, and was attended by the Assistant Watermaster.
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 2024 water level measurements were uploaded to the CASGEM system in November 2024. Data for Spring 2025 should be received by the Watermaster in the next few weeks and will be uploaded to the system by June 30, 2025. DWR previously requested an update to the CASGEM monitoring Plan for ULARA but later cancelled that request.
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 requires letters of support by Groundwater Basin Managers, Administrators, and Watermasters. The ULARA Watermaster has received a number of such requests in 2025, and to date has provided letters of support for those projects in ULARA. As necessary, the ULARA Watermaster attends meeting with project proponents.

## **D. ULARA “Policies and Procedures” Update**

LADWP maintains the original Watermaster Library at their headquarters in downtown Los Angeles. LADWP has been working to catalog the library and help to identify key files and documents that will be useful to help future Watermasters and Administrative Committee Members understand decisions made over time within ULARA. Such cataloging was identified by the ULARA Administrative Committee as a key step in the process of updating the ULARA “Policies and Procedures” documents. 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. Once complete, the Watermaster (in conjunction with the Administrative Committee) will prepare an update to the most current "Policies and Procedures" document for ULARA. 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.