

STPUD close to meeting state water cutbacks

By Kathryn Reed

Customers in South Tahoe Public Utility District have done a good job in conserving water, but cumulatively have not met the state's 20 percent reduction goal.

This week officials announced that the restrictions would remain in effect through October. In April 2015, Gov. Jerry Brown said combined water districts in the state must reduce consumption by 25 percent from 2013, with the individual district cuts ranging from 4 to 36 percent.

STPUD started water rationing in 2007, so it was harder to make substantive inroads last year. Customers were already limited to three days a week for outdoor watering. This initially led to a usage reduction of 25 percent.

From June through December 2015 the district reduced water use by 18.4 percent from 2013 numbers. It was easier to make cuts in the summer via irrigation, whereas in the winter in Tahoe it is harder to find ways to lessen what comes out of the spigot.

The change announced Feb. 2 gives the district a 3 percent credit for a drier climate than the coastal areas during the summer. This in turns lowers the target water use reduction compared to 2013 to 17 percent for 2016 instead of 20 percent.

Statewide, consumers have reduced water use by 25.5 percent since June. This equates to almost 1.1 million acre-feet of water saved. The goal was to save 1.2 million acre-feet through the end of this month.

In December, the statewide conservation rate was 18.3 percent,

down from 20.4 percent in November, compared to the same months in 2013.

Districts can face fines if they don't meet the state rules. To date, South Tahoe PUD has not been fined, but a warning letter has been received from the state.

"Since cumulatively we're within a couple percent, the letter was more of an urging to step up our efforts. Since most of the suggestions had to do with outside watering, for us, it was rather meaningless," Richard Solbrig, STPUD general manager, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "Since we're trying, the next letter may require us to provide more detail on exactly what conservation efforts we have been pursuing."



Removing sod is one way South Tahoe PUD customers are saving water. Photo/LTN

Month-by-month STPUD data from 2015 compared to 2013:

- June – 24.6 percent reduction
- July – 27.5 percent reduction

- August – 21 percent reduction
- September – 15.8 percent reduction
- October – 7.3 percent reduction
- November – 3.5 percent increase
- December – 14.4 percent reduction.

The increased use in water in November was from Heavenly Mountain Resort's snowmaking, according to Solbrig. December tapered off because of the cold temps not requiring as much of the fake stuff.

The district also has the authority to fine residential and commercial customers. In 2015, STPUD fined Safeway and Shell gas station for excessive water use.