

STPUD has enough water for next 3 decades

By Kathryn Reed

South Tahoe Public Utility District has enough water for the next 31 years.

This is according to a stress test the agency did in the groundwater basin below the 20,500-acre service area.

“With the demand from 2013, 2014 and 2015 averaging 6,173 acre-feet per year, we have over 31 years of water supply in storage,” STPUD General Manager Richard Solbrig told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The results mean the state removed the defined conservation percentage South Tahoe PUD was supposed to meet.

The State Water Resources Control Board asked water districts to conduct the test in order to assess the state’s overall water supply in the wake of four years of drought. Agencies passing the test will not face a state-mandated conservation standard through January 2017. Even so, officials are hoping districts would continue to not be wasteful.

That’s happening locally.

“Even though we are not under a defined conservation order, our customers have still reduced demand over the March through July period this year by 16 percent compared to 2013, the base year used by the SWRCB for conservation calculations,” Solbrig said.

This comes even though it has been a record dry summer for the entire Lake Tahoe Basin. The South Shore has also experienced record heat at times.

Of the 379 suppliers that submitted stress tests, 36 said they would face a supply shortage in 2019. Those districts will be required to meet a conservation standard equal to the shortage amount. Thirty-two suppliers did not submit stress tests. This means they will retain their March 2016 conservation standards through January 2017.

“Last year, with the lowest snowpack in 500 years after three terrible drought years, and less than impressive response to our earlier calls for conservation, we needed to step in and mandate specific conservation targets to prepare in case we had yet another record bad year in a row,” State Water Board Chair Felicia Marcus said in a statement.

The state is still refining water policies. Various entities are working on standards with the goal of improving water conservation and efficiency in the years ahead based on climate, population, and business types, rather than percentage reductions off a given baseline. The new standards would also likely include permanent prohibitions on wasteful water use, improved drought planning, and enhanced leak detection and repair requirements.

Still in place are the regulations that prohibit hosing down a sidewalk, overwatering a landscape to where water is running off the lawn, and requiring restaurants to not automatically serve water.