

STPUD survives first storms with no spills

By Kathryn Reed

On Jan. 8, South Tahoe Public Utility District pumped more than twice as much treated water than it does on July 4 – normally it's busiest day.

That's what happens when the skies open and rain doesn't stop.

In that 24-hour period more than 12½ million gallons passed through the South Shore sewer district. This was the seventh largest 24-hour flow in the district's history. The record was 17.29 million gallons on Feb. 17, 1986.

South Tahoe PUD's board got an update Jan. 19 on how the district handled the first round of January storms.

The best news is there were no spills. Plus, the district stayed within its permitted allowable discharge per Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board. STPUD has a permit for 18½ million gallons at one time. It hit 17½ million gallons on Jan. 8. Changes to its infrastructure allows it to handle 20 million gallons at once. Because of these improvements the district plans to ask Lahontan to revise its permit.

If the district were to go over the permitted allotment, it could be fined. The last fine came in March 1995.

Once things dry out, district personnel will be investigating the Upper Truckee pump station because it had one of the largest flows when normally it has one of the smallest.

"This indicates a failure in the system," district Assistant General Manager Shannon Cotulla told the board. "Going forward we want to look at that collection area."

Power outages kept crews busy. It was hard to find diesel in town because STPUD was buying so much to keep its generators at the plant and pump stations going.

“It took a Herculean effort to keep things from spilling out there,” Cotulla said of Fallen Leaf Lake.

Employees worked around the clock, some sleeping at district facilities, to ensure the equipment kept running and no wastewater got into the environment.