

## OurwaterQuality

# Another La Niña winter may be ahead

I think we are all disappointed to learn that weather forecasters are predicting another La Niña weather phenomenon occurring this winter. As encouraged as we have been by the late summer rains, at the time of this writing we are still about three inches below the average year-to-date precipitation and, depending on precipitation during the next few months, possibly heading for the driest year in recorded history.

This situation has implications for both water quantity and water quality. Of the city's three sources of supply — aquifer water in the city and Buckman well fields, Rio Grande water delivered via the Buckman Direct Diversion (BDD) project, and the McClure and Nichols surface reservoirs — the latter source requires the least processing because the water does not pass through aquifers and pick up additional minerals and contaminants.

About one month ago, and before the monsoon rains really began, reservoirs were at 30 percent of combined capacity. Now (as of the last daily report on Sept. 14), and I must admit to being surprised, they are at just over 36 percent of combined capacity. Even though we have had some rather intense rain storms, at least locally, current capacity illustrates the point that snowmelt is our principal source of water to top off the reservoirs. Because of these relatively low water levels, the Canyon Water Treatment Plant, which normally processes the surface water, is temporarily shut down.

For the last week, water production has averaged as follows: city wells 17 percent, Buckman wells 39.1 percent and Buckman Direct Diversion 43.9 percent.

This was not exactly the plan for the first year of BDD as it was anticipated that the new plant would allow the city to rest the aquifers and allow them to recover. It was also reasonable to expect that the surface reservoirs would be making a contribution to the mix. You may have also recently



observed the state of the Santa Fe River: dry except immediately after storms. I think it is reasonable to assume that we would be on a higher level of water restrictions (rather than the current prohibition of outdoor irrigation between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. through Oct. 31) if it had not been for the timely startup of BDD.

Water-supply issues have been a topic of discussion at the last few Water Conservation Commission meetings and it is clear that it is a high priority with the city. The definition (operational water system supply as a percentage of operational water system demand) for imposing more stringent requirements are spelled out in Chapter 25 and Exhibits C and D of the City Code. You may judge for yourself whether the Water Emergency Management Plan provides adequate protection against another potential La Niña winter.

We must give the city credit for planning ahead, but it is very difficult to predict natural phenomena (such as the La Niña weather phenomenon), fires of both natural and anthropogenic origin, high ash content of Rio Grande water, disruptions to supply and distribution, etc... all these factors in addition to the high predictability of low precipitation even in an average year.

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