

Westside Water Association Newsletter

Spring 2020

The daffodils are up, the flowering trees are bursting with blossoms and our temperatures are starting to rise again so it must be...March. Although we still have some risk of storms and a cold snap, we appear to have had a fairly mild winter. That's it for the good news; now for the rest.

World flips on its axis

Since we first wrote a draft of this newsletter the world has changed almost incomprehensibly. A global viral pandemic unprecedented in over 100 years has sent a huge shockwave through our health and financial systems and people's psyches. We know you are likely on corona-overload so suffice it to say that the board recognizes the disruption this is causing for our members. If you are experiencing new financial challenges we are very willing to work with you to ease them as best we can. Contact President Jeff Thurlow (jeffreythurlow@comcast.net) or our operator-manager Doug Dolstad (iwm.1@juno.com) to follow up.

Rate increase on March Billing

Several of you have noted the rate increase that appears on the March bill. Here is the explanation and the math. In May 2019 the Board voted to have an annual rate increase of 1.8% starting with the May 2019 billing. This action is consistent with our policy over the past several years to use the the Consumer Price Index for the previous year to calculate an annual rate increase. Unfortunately that increase was not communicated to our bookkeeper and that error was only discovered in February. The Board determined that it was appropriate to apply this increase back to May 2019 so you are seeing effectively the entire year increase in one billing. We apologize for this error and for not getting out in front of it better with a communication. In any case that is the story.

King County Right of Way Fee

We have been billing members (~\$5/billing period) for the past two years while the lawsuit filed by water and sewer districts to block this fee proceeded through the courts. Late in 2019 the Washington State Supreme Court issued its ruling on this matter upholding King County's right to assess this fee. We have not heard from King County about this assessment since the ruling but expect to soon. King County had previously informed us that they expect to collect this fee back to their original notification date to WWA of April 2018. Once we get a final figure, we will inform members and adjust our accrual rate accordingly.

Leak, Leaks and more Leaks

Since summer 2019 we have had a number of sequential and substantial leaks: some on the system side and some on member's properties. The net effect of those leaks is that we have been pumping about a quarter of our water back into the ground since last summer. Not a good situation. We closely monitor losses from leaks, work to find them and repair them promptly when found. During this period our pattern has been one of a sequence of medium sized leaks. As of this writing we appear to have placed enough thumbs in the various holes to be relatively leak free. But we have also felt like we were in this situation several times in the last 8 months so stay tuned. Leaks reduce our capacity to deliver water to you and though repairing them is funded from a portion of our operating budget, ultimately it is the much larger, asset replacement fund, that will allow us to bring these losses down, over time, to a more manageable level.

Anderson Well status

We have continued to see a decline in the ground water level that affects the productivity of the Anderson Wells. It is clear at this point that the amount of water we have been pumping from these wells (~2 million cubic feet per year) is not sustainable. What is not clear is what the sustainable level of pumping will be. We have reduced our dependence on the Anderson Wells since December, relying more heavily on the Canyon Well points (that we normally reduce our use of through the winter). At the present time (and water level) the maximum sustained pumping rate that we can achieve from the two Anderson wells is about 35 gallons per minute (gpm) which means our overall peak capacity of all sources is probably about 60 gpm.

What does this mean for you?

We have enough high-quality water year-round for basic domestic use. However, we are predicting that we do not have enough water to service the historical additional peak demand due to outdoor watering in the July/August period without using the Canyon Well with its elevated arsenic level. We will, of course, manage our resource carefully to minimize the amount of Canyon Well usage but unless we have an extraordinarily cool, cloudy and rainy summer we will have to return to its use this summer. You can play a role in this balance by reducing garden and lawn watering...the more you conserve the less we will need to use the Canyon Well. Historically, 11% of the members use 30% of the water on an annual basis and the board believes it needs to take this disparity into account as we search for long term solutions for our water needs. Again, if we had the water we'd be happy to sell it to our water co-op members at the quantities we have historically been able to provide. The bigger users actually help lower the cost to everyone. But, given the lowering water tables supplying the wells we are being more cautious with our predictions of available water without using the Canyon well (the one with higher levels of arsenic)

At our last Annual Meeting we discussed the need to establish a protocol for a time when we cannot meet all demands and would need to either curtail the water volumes delivered to member or use our less than ideal source (Canyon well) to make up the deficit. Establishing a quantity of water we can guarantee each member based on historical average usage an essential element of good management. This average number is referred to in the water business as an “ERU” (Equivalent Residential Usage) Once an ERU is defined, how we create and implement policies that secure that guaranteed minimum, when under stress, will need to be established. Our current situation highlights the need for this policy. It is the Board’s goal to have this work ready to present to all members at our next annual meeting. We request that any of you who has an interest in working on this to contact us. Your input is necessary for us to follow our members goals.

Any members who wish to be placed on a notification list for when we do need to turn on the Canyon Well this summer should contact Doug Dolstad at iwm.1@juno.com or (206) 715-3805.

The Westside Water Association Board

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