



Photo by John Carman



# Casitas Newsletter Fall 2020

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### Connect with Us!

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## GM's Corner

Greetings,

I am pleased to bring you the Casitas Municipal Water District's fall newsletter: an update on the District's work to deliver quality service, a more secure water supply and public recreation opportunities. If you have received this newsletter it means you get some of your water from Lake Casitas, either directly from the District or indirectly through another provider.

- **Adjudication Update:** The Casitas Board of Directors continues to remain actively engaged in this critical local water rights lawsuit.
- **The District's Draft Comprehensive Water Resources Plan:** The draft plan was released earlier this summer with the goal of continued delivery of affordable high-quality water to our customers. The District is reviewing the feedback received and an updated draft of the plan will be released in 2021.
- **Casitas Projects Update:** The District continues to make excellent progress in several

important project areas including wildfire resiliency, the Robles Fish Screens and improvements to the Casitas drinking water distribution system.

- **Operations at the Lake Casitas Recreation Area:** Currently, the Lake Casitas Recreation Area (LCRA) is open to camping, vehicles, boats, walk-ins and a new feature: Movie Nights at Lake Casitas. The LCRA works with county health officials to manage the risk of COVID-19 spread, and we appreciate your patience as we navigate this unprecedented time.

We welcome any feedback you may have about our services. Please reach out at 805-649-2251 (ext. 0) or info@casitaswater.com.

Sincerely,

Mike Flood,  
General Manager, Casitas Municipal Water District





## Adjudication Update

The District is actively defending and protecting the District's water rights as part of the ongoing Ventura River Watershed Adjudication process.

In 2014, Santa Barbara Channelkeeper sued the City of Ventura (City) for its groundwater pumping from the Ventura River and potential harm to the endangered Southern California Steelhead. In response, the City initiated a watershed adjudication, involving several water providers, many water groundwater producers and thousands of landowners in the Ventura River Watershed.

In September, the City along with other major groundwater pumpers released a Draft Stipulated Judgment and Physical Solution that raises questions for the future of local water rights, including those related to the District's operation of Lake Casitas.

The Draft Stipulated Judgment and Physical Solution also proposes a water management structure and related cost allocation that fails to recognize Casitas' nearly twenty years of public investment and stewardship to protect and preserve Southern California Steelhead. Under a federal 2003 Biological Opinion, Casitas constructed a state-of-the-art Fish Passage Facility at its Robles Diversion, and has significantly reduced its water supply diversions from the Ventura River into Lake Casitas in order to provide for required instream flows that mimic natural storms, to help the steelhead.

The document also includes many non-flow measures designed to improve steelhead habitat, along with a shared responsibility among local stakeholders. The Casitas Board of Directors supports a cooperative local effort for watershed management. However, the cooperative framework proposed in the Stipulated Judgment and Physical Solution should also involve cooperation on local water rights, and that begins with the City withdrawing its unproven water rights claims. A cooperative regional initiative on steelhead fisheries issues could proceed outside a costly court proceeding.

Casitas wants its customers and the broader Ventura River watershed community to know that Casitas will evaluate every fair and reasonable option to reach a resolution that protects the interests of the District on behalf of those we serve.

Casitas recently adopted a new City of Ventura Adjudication Charge which became effective on July 1, 2020 and now appears on customers' water bills to expressly fund the expense associated with the District's defense in the adjudication lawsuit.

We know many customers have questions about the proceedings. Since this is an active legal case, there are some details which must remain confidential. At the same time, we would like to share information that is publicly available, and encourage readers to visit our online resources to learn more: [www.casitaswater.org/for-customers/adjudication-information](http://www.casitaswater.org/for-customers/adjudication-information).

**“The cooperative framework proposed...should also involve cooperation on local water rights, and that begins with the City withdrawing its unproven water rights claims.”**

**“A cooperative regional initiative on steelhead fisheries issues could proceed outside a costly court proceeding.”**

## Your District at Work: Project Updates



### WILDFIRE RESILIENCY PROJECTS

The District is actively pursuing a \$5 million Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) grant to purchase and install more than three megawatts of backup power for the District's three largest water pumping plants. These large generators will provide backup power during extended power outages caused by wildfires, earthquakes, and Edison's Public Safety Power Shutoffs (PSPS). This project will add a critical component to the District's current abilities to maintain water service and fire protection during natural disasters and other emergencies.



### ROBLES FISH SCREEN PROJECT

This project involves the purchase, installation and testing of upgraded fish screens at the Robles Fish Passage Facility. The Facility was constructed in 2006 to enhance protection for the endangered Southern California Steelhead. The new and improved fish screens will improve the efficiency of the District's diversions to Lake Casitas while protecting the endangered Southern California Steelhead.

Learn more about diversions here: [www.casitaswater.org/your-water/learn-about-diversions](http://www.casitaswater.org/your-water/learn-about-diversions)



### OJAI WATER SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS

Through a vote of Ojai's Golden State Water customers in 2013 and subsequent negotiations with the Golden State Water Company, the District acquired Golden State's Ojai Water System in June of 2017.

After the acquisition, Casitas took over management of the Ojai Water System, whose aging infrastructure produced leaks and water main breaks at a rate more than three times that of Casitas' existing system, requiring immediate action to avoid any disruption in water service.

To date, Casitas has now completed main replacement projects on Sunset, Ventura, Emily and Canada Streets replacing old and undersized pipelines, valves and service lines and upgrading fire hydrants.

These infrastructure improvement projects are funded through a voter-approved tax on properties within the Ojai Water System, and the District is proud that we are still able to provide our customers with affordable, high-quality water while maintaining significantly lower water rates.



### COMING SOON!

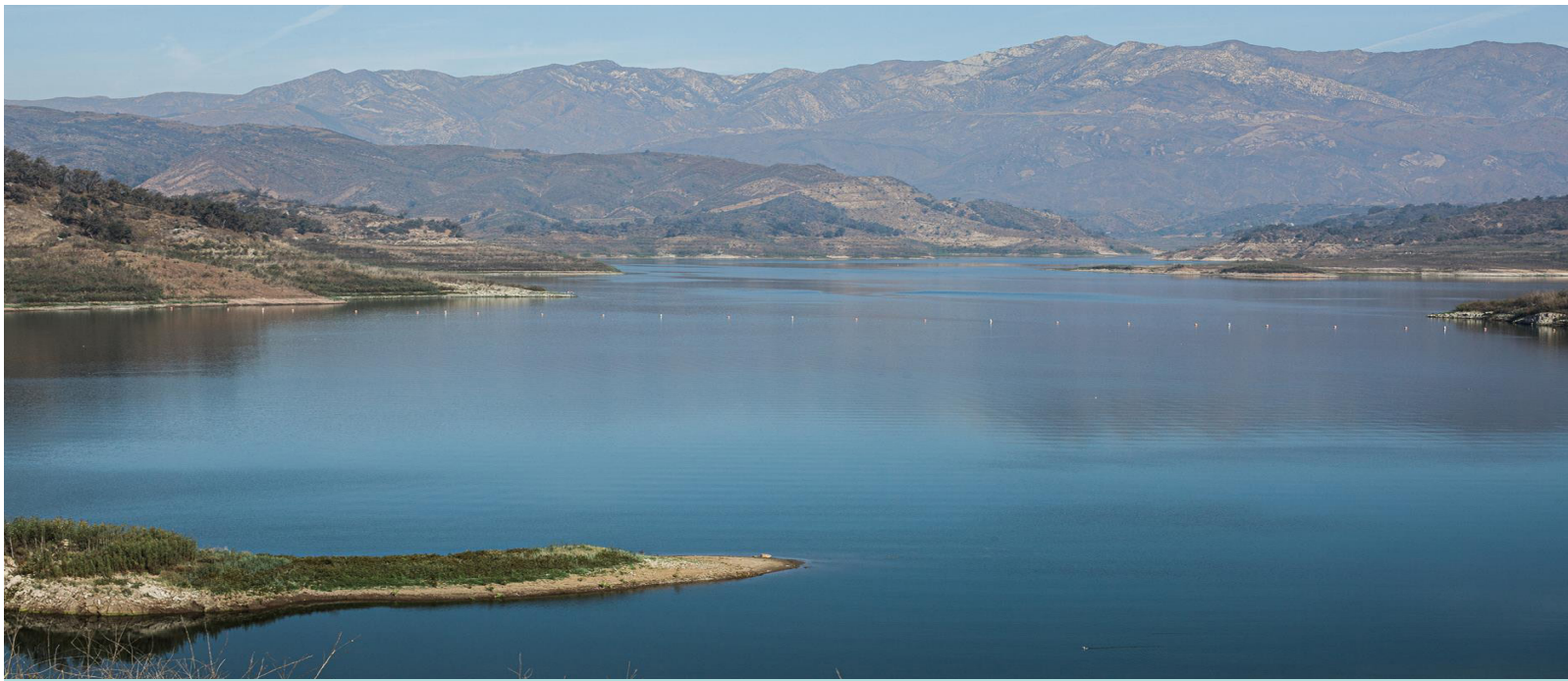
On November 30, the District will begin construction on the West Ojai Pipeline replacement project. Construction is expected to take four months and will cause some disruption to traffic while we work to upgrade vital infrastructure.

## Conservation Tip

**Don't forget to reduce your irrigation timers in fall and winter as plants don't require as much water!**







## Comprehensive Water Resources Plan

This June, the District released a draft of the plan we have been working on to protect our water supply in Lake Casitas and provide recommendations to secure our water future – the Comprehensive Water Resources Plan:

- Is the product of extensive study, research and public input.
- Found that, without action, Lake Casitas could be almost dry in the next six years if faced with continued drought conditions and higher temperatures.
- Assesses our community's ability to meet our immediate and future need for more water.
- Outlines a forward-looking approach to develop a more sustainable, secure and diversified water supply portfolio.

Planning for our region's water future is our responsibility, but it is also an ongoing conversation with our community, and the District is grateful that so many voiced their opinions on the plan. The District is reviewing your feedback and will be making significant updates to the plan to reflect what we have heard. The District will be releasing a new version in 2021 for additional input from our community.

For more information on the plan, please visit: [www.casitaswater.org/your-water/casitas-water-security](http://www.casitaswater.org/your-water/casitas-water-security).