

FALL · 2023

CASITAS

NEWSLETTER

General Manager's Corner

Hello:

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.

- **Your District at Work:** The District has completed multiple projects to upgrade the aged Ojai Water System and increase the system's reliability. An important component to this effort is the ambitious project of replacement of the pipeline in Ojai Avenue. Casitas also continues work on water supply security projects which includes the Ventura/Santa Barbara Counties Intertie.
- **Water Supply Status:** Casitas' customers consistently demonstrate their understanding of local water conditions with an overall conservation response that exceeds the District's water use restrictions. Although the water level of Lake Casitas has rebounded significantly this year, conservation remains an important priority so that supplies will be available for future drought conditions. As of June 1, 2023, the District returned to a Stage 1 designation wherein customers are asked to voluntarily conserve at a 20% level.
- **Water Rate Study:** On September 13th, the Casitas Board of Directors set a hearing date and directed staff to send out notices for a proposed water rate adjustment. These actions were based on a recently conducted water rate study that incorporates the District's operational needs and financial goals. Casitas' last water rate adjustment occurred in July 2021. Most of our direct customers receiving a water bill from Casitas will have already received these notices but a copy of the notice along with the water rate study can be found at this link:

<https://www.casitaswater.org/Home/Components/News/News/149/17>

Thank you for your interest in your local water district, serving our community for more than sixty years.



Regards,
Mike Flood, General Manager

Your District Board of Directors

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Your District At Work

The West and East Ojai Avenue Pipeline project is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2023. Numerous challenges extended the duration of the construction, including unknown underground utilities within the roadway, heavy rains in 2023, and Caltrans constraints on the timing of work activities. We appreciate the community's patience through this challenging project.

The Ventura-Santa Barbara Intertie project, intended to provide 2,000 acre-feet per year of water to Casitas, is moving forward. Funding will be provided through a combination of grants and zero-interest loans from state and federal agencies. Compliance with the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) should start by the end of the year and will take 12-18 months to complete. Acquisition of easements for the pipeline and purchase of land for the two pump stations are being undertaken. Design for all components of the project (pipeline and two booster pump stations) is well underway. This project will provide a vital connection between Casitas and Carpinteria Valley Water District during emergencies and allow Casitas access to its State Water Project allotment.

For more information on completed and in-progress projects, or to sign up for project updates, please visit casitaswater.org/for-customers/your-district-at-work.

Water Supply Status

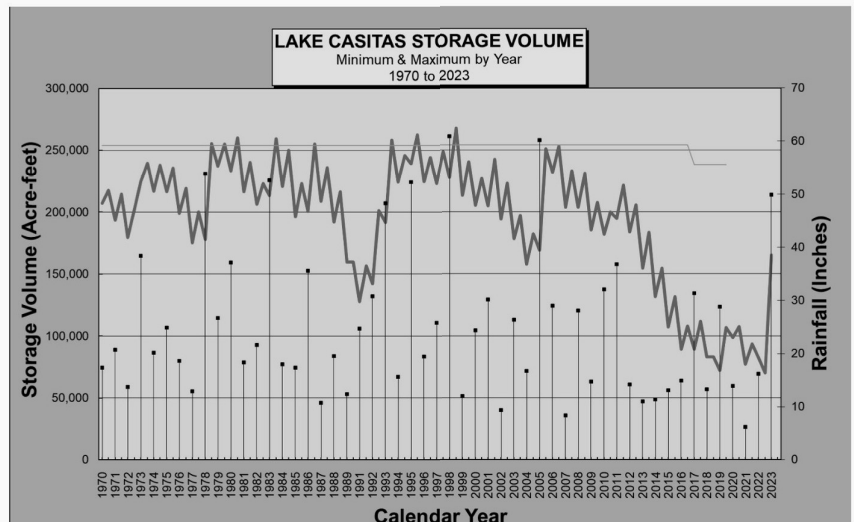
Casitas Municipal Water District was formed in 1952 and provides water service to western Ventura County for agricultural, residential, commercial, governmental, and industrial uses. All supplies currently delivered originate from the local Ventura River watershed. The major water sources are Lake Casitas and local groundwater basins.

The past rainy season brought an extraordinary amount of precipitation and improved water supply. As of September 20, 2023, the water level in Lake Casitas was 171,811 acre-feet or 72.2% of capacity -- a substantial increase from 30% of capacity at the beginning of the season. Local groundwater basins also experienced remarkable recharge and recovery.

As a result of current water levels, the Casitas Board of Directors lifted the Stage 3 water use restrictions and adopted a Stage 1 condition. Customers are encouraged to use water wisely for future years should dry conditions return. As always, water waste prohibitions remain in effect. More information regarding what Stage 1 means for you can be found at casitaswater.org/for-customers/water-conservation/drought-stage.

While we are grateful for the rain, there were some difficulties with it all coming at once. The intensity of the rainfall during the January 2023 storms resulted in extensive erosion and heavy debris, causing damage to Casitas water facilities. Major repairs to maintain water service have been completed, and work continues in preparation for another potential wet winter season.

This past year was a historic for Casitas in many ways. Since December 1, 2022, Casitas experienced a record low lake level at Lake Casitas, a record high in the amount of annual water inflows to Lake Casitas resulting from precipitation, and a record low annual water use by our customers. This underscores the high variability and boom-and-bust cycles that can occur in our watershed. While Casitas is preparing for a potential wet season ahead, a dry cycle can occur again and work continues on projects underway to mitigate future droughts and emergencies.



Water Rate Study

On September 13, the Board of Directors set a public hearing for December 13, 2023, and instructed staff to send out notices informing customers of proposed changes to Casitas' water rates.

As required by Proposition 218, the proposed water rate structure is based on a comprehensive rate study using a rate model developed by an independent rate consultant to evaluate the cost of service. If adopted, the three-year water rate schedule will become effective January 1 of the years 2024 through 2026.

As a result of the study, the District has determined revenue requirements will increase. Key factors include:

- Replace and modernize aging infrastructure such as pipelines, tanks, and pumping stations necessary to convey water to customers.
- Cover the rising cost of service with the proposed rates assuming 5% inflation annually for the next three years.
- Replenish depleted reserves to prepare for future emergencies.
- Strengthen water supply resiliency. The proposed rates include the construction of a regional intertie pipeline project known as the Ventura-Santa Barbara Counties Intertie.

For more information on the proposed water rate adjustments and the water rate study, please visit: casitaswater.org/Home/Components/News/News/149/17

New Bill Pay Options

Casitas Municipal Water District is excited to announce the launch of a new and improved utility billing and payment portal coming this fall. The new portal will offer a host of fee-free payment options that include online credit card payment, Amazon Pay, Apple Pay, Google Pay, Paypal, Venmo, pay-by-phone, pay-by-text, and pay-by-email.

As part of this upgrade, direct customers will need to set up a new pay account within the new portal. Please stay tuned for instructions that will be coming soon. For more information, please visit casitaswater.org/paymentportal.



Lake Casitas Recreation Area & Water Adventure

Lake Casitas Recreation Area

With increased lake levels, visitation has increased in camping and day-use areas. All areas have reopened after Winter/Spring storm damage. Casitas converted Campground Deer to a group camping area.

The next phase of improvements to Campground Fox has begun. We are making the sites drought-tolerant, planting native trees, and future-proofing sites. Soon we hope to add Cabins to Fox Campground.

Casitas Water Adventure

This season was a massive success for the Casitas Water Adventure! Casitas trained and hired over 80 American Red Cross Certified Lifeguards, most of whom are students at local high schools.

The new Mega Play Unit (MPU) with five slides and a large dump bucket was a huge hit.

Next season we plan to offer an annual pass for the water park and increase the number of days we offer water aerobics. Additionally, upgrades to reduce water usage are continuing.

For more information about Lake Casitas Recreation Area, visit us at: www.casitaswater.org/recreation





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Groundwater Adjudication Update

Casitas is committed to defending the District's water rights on behalf of you, our valued customer.

Several parties have requested a temporary stay in the case to allow a mediation process to occur. A major outcome of mediation has been an order exempting small water users. The mediation parties are continuing to work together on several other issues.

The adjudication process may take several years to resolve, and Casitas is focused on an outcome based on the best science and an effective long-term management structure.

All of Casitas' court filings are publicly available on our website: www.casitaswater.org/for-customers/adjudication-information

Upcoming Events

2023 Water Security & Facilities Tour

Join Michael Flood, General Manager and District Staff on an informative tour of Casitas' facilities and learn about the work that the District is doing to increase our customers' water security. The tour includes visits to the Casitas Dam and the Robles Diversion and Fish Passage.

- Saturday, October 28, 2023 | 9 AM – 12:30 PM; or
- Saturday, November 4, 2023 | 9 AM – 12:30 PM

Space is limited, RSVP required – please email: mortiz@casitaswater.com

Ojai Day 2023

Come visit our booth!
October 21, 2023 10 AM