



LAKEHAVEN UTILITY DISTRICT

31627 1st Ave. S. | PO Box 4249 | Federal Way, WA 98063-4249
Federal Way: 253-941-1516, Tacoma: 253-927-2922 | www.lakehaven.org

March - April 2015

Commissioner's Corner

Tim McClain



As I sit here in early February writing this article for the Newsletter, I can't help but be amazed by the fact that we are in the middle of yet another wet and warm week in the Puget Sound area. Temperatures in the upper 50's and lower 60's appear to be the norm this winter. The stretch of abnormally warm weather has persisted almost the entire winter of 2015, prompting a headline in the morning paper to ask: "WHERE'S THE SNOW". Unfortunately, the lack of snowpack in the mountains at this time of year is not as rare a phenomenon as we might like it to be. You may recall that we had these very conditions last year during this time. We were lucky enough, however, to receive a large amount of late snowfall that allowed the snowpack to recover to near normal levels. Hopefully by the time you read this article we will have had the same late season snows and will be much closer to standard snowpack conditions in the mountains.

The reason for the concern: snow isn't just for skiers and snowboarders. Most areas in the Puget Sound region rely on, to one degree or another, winter snows for water supply during the rest of the year. The snowpack in the mountains serves the same purpose as the water tanks you see around the District. The mountain snow stores water until the warmer times of the year when it is most needed. As I write this article, the snowpack throughout the Central Cascades in Washington is listed at between 15% and 58% of normal levels. In the area that feeds the Green River Watershed, the snowpack is only 16% of normal for this time of year.

As conditions may become more critical as we head into summer, the question on the minds of most District customers will concern what impact the low snowpack will have on our water supply this summer? The answer is: not nearly as much as it will be for water agencies that have only a surface water source of supply. As a result of the foresight of others who served on the Board well before my time, Lakehaven gets its water from two sources of supply. The first is water that comes from the Green River Watershed. This surface water source is known as the Second Supply System, which was developed by a partnership of local water utilities consisting of the District, the City of Tacoma, Covington Water District and the City of Kent. We also have twenty-five different water production

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wells spread throughout the District. These wells draw on water held in three different aquifers that exist below ground within the District's boundaries. While the systems can be operated concurrently, we prefer to use the Second Supply System water as much as possible because, unlike the well system, it comes with pressure attributable to the higher elevation of its source and requires little or no electric energy to deliver to your homes and businesses. Enhancing this further, with the new filtration plant on the Green River almost complete and ready to go into operation, we would, under normal conditions, be able to use this supply of water even more in periods where we experience higher water turbidity in the watershed, which occur typically in the rainy seasons.

The low snowpack may well drive a shift in how we operate this summer. This is particularly true since the water right we maintain to draw water from the Green River is subject to a prior right for minimum flows in the river system necessary to support salmon migration. Until those flows are met, no water will be available for public water supply. Fortunately, while the snowpack may be at record low levels, the aquifers are almost 100% full. Further, as a result of the wet weather we have had, and would anticipate for the spring, the groundwater supply should continue to be in really good shape for an extended period of time. In the late fall and winter seasons, the water usage within the Lakehaven District will average between 7 and 8 million gallons of water per day. In the late spring, summer and early fall periods we will average between 9 and 11 million gallons per day. Considering that our wells can produce up to 30 million gallons per day if need be, you can see that usage of 9 to 11 million gallons per day is well within the capability of our groundwater system. If we need to use the well water more than normal this summer, the District will face higher electric bills because it takes electricity to run these wells, but we will not be facing a water shortage or any type of rationing that we can foresee. Additionally even with the low snowpack, managers of the watershed feel they will be able to fill the reservoir on the Green River with spring rains by summer.

The water supply situation in this region is likely to be more and more in the headlines as we get closer to the higher demand season this summer. While others may experience water shortages, we anticipate no problems meeting your full needs for water throughout the year. While you can be confident in the water supply, we still ask that you be water-wise and use only as much water as you need!

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Your Board of Commissioners

Tim McClain - President
Don Miller - Vice President
Ron Nowicki - Secretary
Len Englund - Commissioner
Chuck Gibson - Commissioner

Regular Board of Commissioners meetings are held the 2nd and 4th Thursdays of each month.
These meetings are held at the Lakehaven Center at:

Lakehaven Center
31531 First Ave. S.
Federal Way at 6 p.m.

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