

TO: Andrew P. Powers, City Manager

FROM: Clifford G. Finley, Public Works Director

DATE: September 12, 2023

SUBJECT: **2022-23 Grand Jury Report – Water Availability for Wildfires in Ventura County**

RECOMMENDATION:

1. Approve the written response to the June 12, 2023, Ventura County Grand Jury report, "Water Availability for Wildfires in Ventura County," and authorize staff to forward the response to the Grand Jury.
2. Find that this action is not a project as defined under the California Environmental Quality Act.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

No Additional Funding Requested. The cost of evaluating the Grand Jury Report and preparing a response is included in the Adopted FY 2023-24 Water Fund Budget.

BACKGROUND:

The City's water system serves over 17,000 customer accounts and a population of over 50,000. The City receives treated water from the Calleguas Municipal Water District via 11 metering facilities (turnouts) and distributes it to approximately 36 percent of the City. The City's system includes 16 storage reservoirs, with a total capacity of 35.5 million gallons, 16 booster pump stations, approximately 240 miles of pipeline, and 1,900 fire hydrants.

The City received the 2022-2023 Ventura County Grand Jury Report (Attachment #1) on June 12, 2023. The Grand Jury investigated 15 public water purveyors across Ventura County and their ability to supply adequate water for wildfire suppression. Ventura County frequently experiences fire weather conditions including low humidity, high winds, and dry brush conducive to wildfires, and has 96 percent of its rural and unincorporated lands classified by Cal-Fire as a Very High Fire Severity Zone.

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This Grand Jury review was initiated following the 2017 Thomas Fire and the 2018 Woolsey Fire where water shortages partially hampered firefighters' ability to protect structures. The goal of this report was to address the abilities and vulnerabilities of local public water purveyors to keep water sufficiently supplied to firefighters during wildfires and/or loss of power to water supply facilities, as well as written protocols and procedures, onsite backup power generation, communications between neighboring purveyors, mutual aid agreements, and brush clearance around water supply facilities.

In the report, the Grand Jury recognized the increased future risk of large and destructive Wildfire-Urban Interface (WUI) throughout Ventura County. Water purveyors monitor and regulate the flow of water through wells, pumps, and water storage tanks/reservoirs through Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) computer systems. Water pump stations and SCADA systems rely upon constant reliable electrical power, which can be disrupted by the effects of a wildfire or an electric utility (SCE) Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS). Water purveyors generally initiate procedures preparing their water infrastructure and water storage for potential use to help suppress wildfires in response to Fire Weather Watch (FWW) advisories, Red Flag Warnings (RFW), PSPS, and active wildfires. The Grand Jury found inconsistencies among Ventura County public water purveyors in their abilities to respond to wildfires and supply adequate water for wildland fire suppression in cases of electrical power loss to the system.

Grand Jury Recommendations

The Grand Jury Report contains the following recommendations for all water purveyors, including the City's Water System:

1. Establish written operational procedures and training to provide for increased water supply for fire flow during FWWs, Red RFWs, active fires, and PSPSs.
2. Have emergency power on site for all critical water infrastructure including SCADA systems.
3. Establish common communication protocols with adjoining water purveyors to coordinate needed actions, including water transfers during active fires.
4. Enroll their employees in the FCC Wireless Priority Service (WPS) providing cell phone priority in emergencies.
5. Enroll in the Government Emergency Telecommunications System (GETS) providing landline phone priority in emergencies.

6. Enroll in the California Water/Wastewater Agency Response Network (CalWARN), a network of water and wastewater agencies that can provide emergency resources.

7. Provide brush clearance around water tanks, water supply pumps, pump houses, and related infrastructure.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS:

Pursuant to California Penal Code Sections 933.05, recipients of the Grand Jury Report are required to state whether they agree or disagree with each finding in the report and explain the basis for disagreeing with any finding or portion thereof. The City must also report how it proposes to address or has addressed, the specific recommendations in the report. The responses to the report must include one of the following allowable actions for each recommendation:

1. The recommendation has been implemented, with a summary of the implemented actions;
2. The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, with a timeframe for implementation;
3. The recommendation requires further analysis, with an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a timeframe for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or head of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency when applicable. The timeframe shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the Grand Jury Report; or
4. The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation given.

Per the Grand Jury Report, the City must respond to Findings F-01, F-02, F-03, F-04, F-05, F-06, F-07, F-08, F-09, F-10, F-12, F-13, and F-14, and recommendations R-01, R-02, R-03, R-05, R-06, R-07 and R-08. The City's response has been prepared and can be found in the 2022 - 2023 Grand Jury Report Response (Attachment #2).

COUNCIL GOAL COMPLIANCE:

Meets the following City Council Goals:

B. Provide municipal government leadership that is open and responsive to residents, and is characterized by ethical behavior, stability, promoting public trust, transparency, confidence in the future, and cooperative interaction among civic leaders, residents, business representatives, and staff, while recognizing and respecting legitimate differences of opinion on critical issues facing the City.

D. Maintain strong commitment to public safety (including Police, Fire, Emergency Medical Services, and Emergency Management) to ensure City remains one of the safest Cities in the United States with a population of over 100,000.

F. Provide and enhance essential infrastructure to ensure that the goals and policies of the Thousand Oaks General Plan are carried out and the City retains its role and reputation as a leader in protecting the environment and preserving limited natural resources.

PREPARED BY: John Minkel, Deputy Public Works Director - Operations
Michael Devlahovich, Utilities Superintendent

Attachments:

Attachment #1 – June 12, 2023, Ventura County Grand Jury Report

Attachment #2 – 2022 - 2023 Grand Jury Report Response