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SM groundwater basin healthy

2010-11 rain supplied significant boost



11 HOURS AGO • BY BRIAN BULLOCK/STAFF WRITER/BBULLOCK@SANTAMARIATIMES.COM

The Santa Maria Valley can thank the wet winter of 2010-11 for increasing groundwater levels and maintaining relatively healthy hydrogeologic conditions.

Local water users got a report on the health of the Santa Maria Valley Management Area of the Twitchell Management Authority for 2011, which finds the groundwater basin is healthy and well within historical levels in all measurements.

“There’s nothing alarming there,” said Liese Schadt, senior hydrologist for Luhdorff and Scalmanini Consulting Engineers, which is the authority engineer. “It’s sort of business as usual.”

Schadt said the 9 inches of rain that fell in December 2010, which is about three-fourths of the region’s annual average, raised groundwater levels significantly. She said that rainfall allowed about 70 percent more water to be released from Twitchell Reservoir than normal.

Approximately 52,800 acre feet per year is the average amount of water released from Twitchell Reservoir. Along with that, approximately 39,500 acre feet flow from the Sisquoc River, Schadt said.

In 2011, 150,000 acre feet flowed from the two sources — a change from the trend over the last decade.

“Since about 2001 we’ve had dry conditions where we haven’t be able to store water,” Schadt said.

The dry conditions led to no releases from Twitchell Reservoir from 2002-2004, 2007, 2009 and 2010.

The sizable flows early this year raised the groundwater levels enough to keep them above record lows and water quality remained within historic levels, as well.