

Board urges mandatory cuts, but water director holds off

Sunday, October 28, 2007 11:39 AM

WAILUKU – While the Board of Water Supply is recommending a mandatory 10 percent cut in water use from the Central Maui system, Water Director Jeff Eng said he remains hopeful that education and awareness may be sufficient.

Eng said board members wanted to “send a strong message to the community, particularly to customers in Central and South Maui” and unanimously voted to require a 10 percent cutback.

But he said consumption has been level, remaining below a target of 25.5 million gallons a day on the Central Maui system and falling to 25.14 mgd during the past week.

Still, the department will send letters to restaurants advising they should serve water to customers only on request and to other customers on the Central Maui system that the problem of inadequate source remains serious.

“We need to make everyone aware of the situation and be stewards of Maui County’s resources,” he said. “Habits need to change.”

Demand countywide slid to 40.8 mgd during the period of Oct. 18-24, down about 190,000 gallons a day from the previous week. But it still was above the average 40.2 mgd recorded in October 2006, and Eng remained concerned about long-term effects of low rainfall on the watersheds and the aquifers.

In Upcountry Maui, usage was up slightly, to 7.84 mgd for the week. But the reservoirs remain at 50 percent of capacity, and the water board and Eng continued the order for a mandatory 10 percent reduction in use with an exemption for agricultural customers.

While there have been frequent trade wind showers in the watersheds, the East Maui watershed showed a reduction in flows into the reservoirs. From a high of more than 50 million gallons Oct. 17, the Kahakapao Reservoir was down to 47.6 million gallons Friday.

During the same period, the Wailoa Ditch, which provides water through the Kamole Treatment Plant, slid from 164 mgd Oct. 17 to 66.1 mgd Wednesday, recovering to 123.4 mgd on Friday. The up-and-down flows in the system indicate the watershed has not recovered from three years of low rainfall, with showers helping to restore water flows but little residual moisture in the ground to feed the streams when the rainfall stops.

In his report, Eng noted that a semi-autonomous water board had ordered a suspension on new water meters in 1979. In the 2002 elections, the Maui County Charter was amended to have the water department placed directly under the mayor, with the water board reduced to an advisory role.

During its meeting Thursday, the board approved a recommendation to urge that the County Council develop a countywide policy on issuing water meters, with a focus on the inadequate water sources for the Central Maui system.

The system provides for Kuau-Paia, Wailuku-Kahului and Maalaea-Kihei-Makena. The primary sources are the Iao aquifer with a rated capacity of 20 mgd and the Waihee aquifer with 4 mgd. The water department also has a treatment plant with a capacity of up to 2 mgd taking water from a Wailuku Water Co. ditch.

Copyright © 2007 **The Maui News**.