

# SEA RANCH SANITATION ZONE NEWS

## INSIDE SPRING 2014

- 3 Drought Program Update
- 3 Rebates
- 5 All About Prop. 218
- 7 Rate Protest Form

The official dishwasher of 2014.



**There's a Drought On. Turn the Water Off.**  
WaterOff.org

For more information about the public outreach water conservation campaign, turn to page 3.

## Budget & Fees 101

## Proposition 218 Notice Enclosed Understanding Your Zone's Rate Setting Process

The Sea Ranch Sanitation Zone's (Zone) fiscal year begins on July 1 of each year and runs through June 30 of the following year. Therefore the following information concerns the period from July 1, 2014, through June 30, 2015. Because budgets are prepared approximately six months in advance of the time period they cover, there is ample opportunity for public input and for the required review and approval process to occur.

Public input is a continuous process and can occur at any time during the year. Specific maintenance and construction projects and priorities are regularly reviewed and revised by Sonoma County Water Agency (Water Agency) staff. Many of these projects have their own environmental and construction approval process, which also includes public input.

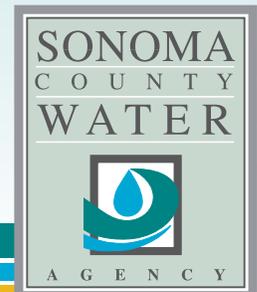
A five-year capital plan is prepared for the Zone by Water Agency staff based on the need for replacement of aging collection systems and other assets necessary to process the wastewater according to regulatory requirements.

Priorities for projects are assigned by taking public input, maintenance data and assessment of the current condition of the facilities into account. The funds available for capital improvements and replacement are then planned for in such a way as to level the expenditures from year-to-year and, as a result, reduce the impact that sharp increases in rates would have on you – the ratepayer.

Budgets also take into account current maintenance and operations costs, any bond or loan repayments, and the necessity to maintain sufficient financial reserves to cover unexpected damage or system failures. Budgets are developed using estimates for these items and for revenues. Because of the uneven timing of the revenues paid to the Zone and because actual costs rarely turn out exactly equal to staff estimates, fund balances or retained earnings are kept at all times. These fund balances typically amount to three-to-six months of operating expenses.

*Continued on page 2*

[www.sonomacountywater.org/SRSZ](http://www.sonomacountywater.org/SRSZ)



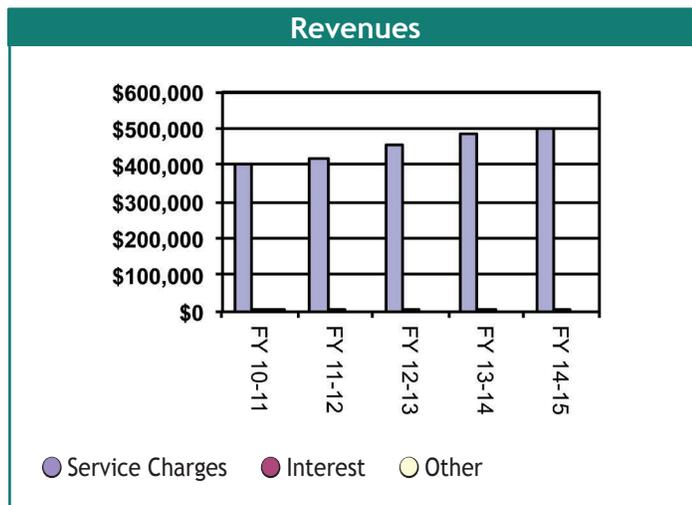
**Budget Approval**

After Water Agency staff has developed the proposed budgets and rates, the budgets are available for public review at libraries throughout the county and at the Water Agency, 404 Aviation Boulevard, Santa Rosa. Typically, this happens at the end of March each year. In addition, notices of the proposed rate are mailed to the owners of all the properties in the Zone at that time. They are also available online. The public can protest rate increases up to the date of the rate hearings, which are typically held in mid-May at the Board of Supervisors chambers.

**Budget Summary**

**Revenue**

The primary sources of revenues are the fees charged to Zone ratepayers and collected on property tax bills sent out by the Sonoma County Tax Collectors Office. Additional revenue sources include interest on fund balances and new connection fees. Proceeds from bonds and debt paid through property assessments may increase the funds available to spend on capital projects but are not counted as Zone revenue. Grants are also a revenue source. Below is a chart showing the Zone’s revenue for the last four years and the projected revenues for the next fiscal year.



**Glossary**

- Capital Project** - A project that replaces or adds assets valued at more than \$25,000.
- Operations** - Activities that provide direct service to system users or to support direct service.
- Maintenance** - Activities that work to keep current equipment, facilities and infrastructure operational.
- ESD** - Equivalent Single Family Dwelling (Commercial and multi-residential properties are charged the flat rate times the number of ESDs).

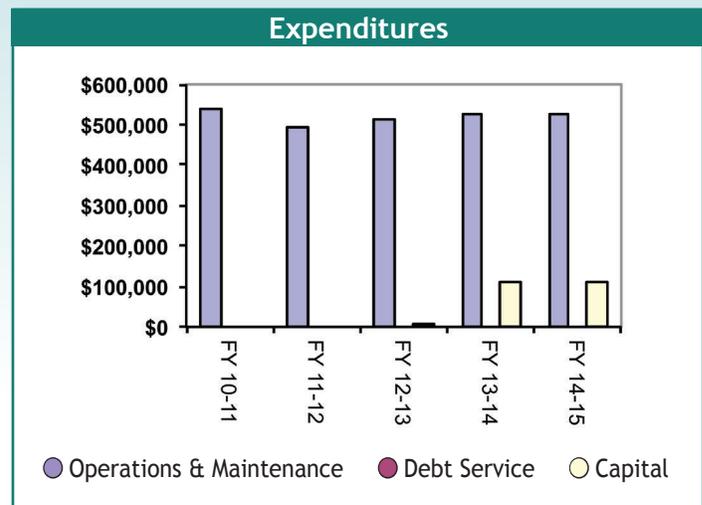
**Expenditures**

Your Zone spends money to:

- Operate the wastewater collection and treatment facilities;
- Maintain and repair Zone facilities; and
- Repay bond, other debt and miscellaneous liabilities that may occur as a result of operation.

Your Zone also spends money to accomplish the capital projects needed in the Zone.

The chart below shows expense level trends over the last four years and next year’s budget.



**Your Budget Questions Answered**

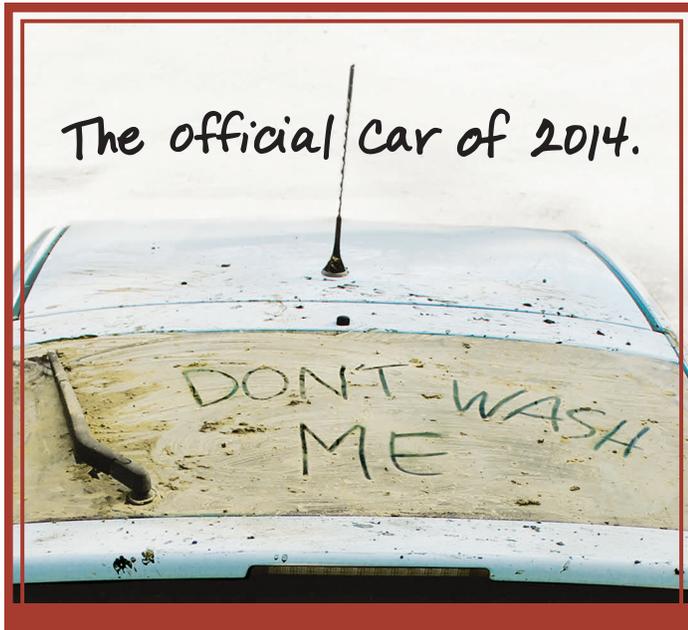
**Q:** Why do my rates seem to increase every year?

**A:** Your Zone tries to manage the system to minimize rate increases while ensuring the infrastructure will be in place to handle current and future needs. The costs of operating the treatment plant and collection system as well as paying for repairs, maintenance and replacement of aging infrastructure must be paid by the users of the system.

**Q:** I live alone. Why do I pay the same as my neighbor with four children?

**A:** The Zone allocates the cost of operations and maintenance using a flat billing method per ESD (similar to the method used by 84% of similar entities in California). This method is very inexpensive and efficient to administer. Billing based on usage would require either data on water usage (which the Zone does not have) or meters on the sewer system, which would be a very costly expense borne by the rate payers. ●

# You can help beat the drought



“There’s a drought on. Turn the water off.” is the public awareness slogan and campaign launched January 7 by the Water Agency along with the Sonoma-Marin Saving Water Partnership.

With the Water Agency’s service area facing drought conditions after experiencing two dry years and the driest year on record in 2013, the goal of the effort is to increase public awareness about the drought and provide conservation tips.

On January 17, Gov. Jerry Brown declared a statewide drought emergency that includes 20 action points. The Water Agency is coordinating with the appropriate state agencies to ensure all action items within its jurisdiction are being met. Many of these action items, including the implementation of a public awareness campaign, have already been implemented. Also, water reuse programs have been implemented in some areas.

For an update on drought and water supply conditions from the Water Agency, go to this website link: [www.sonomacountywater.org](http://www.sonomacountywater.org). To learn about the drought campaign, go to this website link: [www.wateroff.org](http://www.wateroff.org). ●

## Ratepayers Give High Marks for High-Efficiency Fixture Direct Install Program

“This program is awesome and a win-win situation. Thank you!” “Innovative + positive way to ensure water savings and efficiency. Thanks.” “I’m very satisfied with the toilets. It’s a great program, thank you!” “Excellent service.”

Those are several of the many comments from a customer service survey about the Water Agency’s High-Efficiency Fixture Direct Install Program.

Under this Water Agency program, a limited number of high-efficiency fixture retrofits, including toilet, urinal, faucet aerator and showerhead replacements, are offered at no cost to eligible properties with active connections.

To participate, register your property on the program wait list. Properties will be selected on a first-come, first-served basis based on funding availability. For more information, visit [www.sonomacountywater.org/direct-install](http://www.sonomacountywater.org/direct-install) or contact Brian Lee, Water Use Efficiency Specialist, at (707) 547-1918 or [brian.lee@scwa.ca.gov](mailto:brian.lee@scwa.ca.gov). ●

## Sanitation Water Efficiency Rebate Program

To conserve water and save money, customers may participate in the Sanitation Water Efficiency Rebate Program:

**Clothes Washer Rebate** – Receive up to \$125 back on the purchase and installation of a new, qualifying high-efficiency clothes washer (HEW). Rebates are available for all “Tier 3” listed clothes washers except those containing silver ion technology. A \$75 rebate may also be available from PG&E.

**Toilet Rebate** – Get up to \$150 back on the purchase and installation of each new, qualifying high-efficiency toilet (HET) from the List of Qualifying Models.

How to Participate: Rebates on high-efficiency clothes washers and toilets are available on a first-come, first-served basis while funding lasts. For more information, visit [www.sonomacountywater.org/sanitation-rebates](http://www.sonomacountywater.org/sanitation-rebates) or contact Brian Lee, Water Use Efficiency Specialist, at (707) 547-1918 or [brian.lee@scwa.ca.gov](mailto:brian.lee@scwa.ca.gov).





## Sanitation Services – About Your District

In 1995 the Water Agency assumed responsibility from the County of Sonoma for managing the county sanitation districts and zones, including your Zone.

The Zone, operated by the Sea Ranch Water Company, consists of two wastewater collection and treatment systems and currently serves 581 Equivalent Single-Family Dwellings within a 4,600-acre service area.

The Central Plant, which began operation in 1971, is designed to treat average daily dry weather flows of up to 27,000 gallons per day. Treated wastewater is used for irrigation.

The North Plant, which began operation in 1972, is designed to treat average daily dry weather flows of up to 160,000 gallons per day. The secondary treated wastewater is sent to the Gualala Community Services District Treatment Plant where it is treated to tertiary standards and then used to irrigate the Sea Ranch Golf Links. ●



## Prevent Sewer Damage from FOG

Fats, oils and grease (FOG) when poured down the drain may damage sewers, result in overflows and backups, and cause harm to your home and environment. Your Zone provides FREE grease scrapers to help keep FOG from going down the drain. Call the Water Agency Public Affairs Hotline at (707) 524-6430. ●

## How Your Zone Complies with Required Regulations

Regulatory standards for public health and the environment are set by the State Water Resources Control Board, which are then implemented through the Regional Water Quality Control Boards (RWQCB). The Zone operates under a unique, individualized permit from the North Coast RWQCB that sets the requirements for wastewater operations. To comply with these requirements, capital improvement projects and increased rates in your Zone can result. For more information about the California Water Boards, go to this website link: [www.waterboards.ca.gov](http://www.waterboards.ca.gov).



# PROPOSITION 218

## Sonoma County Water Agency Sea Ranch Sanitation Zone

### NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING REGARDING PROPOSED SEWER SERVICE FEE INCREASE

#### Date, Time, and Place of Public Hearing

On May 20, 2014, at 10:00 a.m. or as soon thereafter as the matter may be heard, in the Board Meeting Room, 575 Administration Drive, Room 102A, Santa Rosa, California, the Board of Directors (Board) of the Sonoma County Water Agency (Water Agency) will conduct a public hearing to consider increasing the annual sewer service fee to be collected on account of sewage collection and treatment services provided by the sewer system of the Sea Ranch Sanitation Zone (Zone) to property within the Zone.

#### Property Owner Obligation

The fee will be imposed on each parcel upon which is located one or more structures which are connected to the system and the fee will be collected on the general property tax bill administered by Sonoma County. Payment of the fee will be the responsibility of the owner of the parcel.

#### What the Fee is for and How the Funds Collected Will be Used

The fee is imposed for two purposes: (a) to finance the ongoing operation and maintenance costs of the system and, (b) to pay the capital replacement program costs of the system. The purpose of the capital replacement program is to provide for the long-term replacement of system facilities as they wear out.

#### Amount of Proposed Fee Increase and Method of Calculating the Increased Fee

Effective July 1, 2014, the Zone proposes to increase the fee to \$1,014 per year per “equivalent single-family dwelling” (ESD), an increase of \$32, or 3.3% versus current year. A standard single-family home constitutes one ESD. Parcels which have other uses (for example, apartments and commercial buildings) will be assigned a number of ESDs using standard equivalency factors which estimate the probable quantity and quality of sewage effluent normally generated by such uses in comparison to a single-family home.

The increased fee has been calculated by dividing the annual costs of providing wastewater treatment and collection service by the estimated number of ESDs to arrive at the fee per ESD of \$1,014, and for parcels having more than one ESD assigned, the fee is calculated by multiplying the number of ESDs assigned to the parcel times \$1,014. The draft proposed budget for fiscal year 2014-15 describes the total annual expenses in detail and is available for review at the Sea Ranch Sanitation Zone, c/o the Sonoma County Water Agency, 404 Aviation Boulevard, Santa Rosa, California 95403, and the Sonoma County Regional Libraries in Santa Rosa (Main & Northwest), Windsor, Healdsburg, Cloverdale, Guerneville, Sebastopol, Petaluma, Rohnert Park, Rincon Valley, Sonoma, and Forestville (El Molino High School).

# PROPOSITION 218

## Further Information Available Prior to the Hearing

At the hearing, the Board will consider adoption of an ordinance which will establish the increased fee. A copy of the ordinance is on file and available for review at the Sonoma county Water Agency 404 Aviation Boulevard, Santa Rosa, CA 95403. In addition, the following persons may be contacted at the Agency at (707) 526-5370 for further information and/or obtaining copies of the draft proposed budget for fiscal year 2014-15:

Manuel Olvera, Engineering Technician III  
Candi Bryon, Department Analyst

## Property Owner Protest Procedure

This notice has been mailed to you because records of the Sonoma County Assessor list you as an owner of one or more parcels within the Zone which will be subject to the fee while connected to the system. In the event you have sold property you may have owned within the Zone, please send this notice to the new owner.

Either prior to or at the public hearing, property owners may submit written protests respecting the fee. At the public hearing, the Board will consider all written protests which have been received by the prescribed deadline. In order to be considered, a written protest must be made on the attached form. Only one protest will be counted per parcel. Only protests signed by the current owner(s) will be allowed and must be received no later than the following deadlines:

- If submitted by mail, they must be received (NOT postmarked) no later than 5:00 p.m. on Monday, May 19, 2014, at the mailing address on the form.
- If hand delivered, they must be delivered no later than the close of the public hearing on May 20, 2014, to: Clerk of the Board  
Board Meeting Room, as set forth in the opening paragraph

***Date of this Notice: March 28, 2014***

# RATE PROTEST FORM

NOTE: IN ORDER TO BE CONSIDERED, ANY PROTEST MUST BE ON THIS FORM

## WRITTEN PROTEST

I am the parcel owner of the property located at the address on the back of this form. I am submitting this form to protest the proposed sewer rate increase.

Additional Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Use opposite side or attach additional sheets if needed.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Property Owner Required

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name

*Fold Here First*

Place  
Postage  
Here

Sea Ranch Sanitation Zone  
c/o Sonoma County Water Agency  
404 Aviation Blvd.  
Santa Rosa, CA 95403

*Fold Here Second*

Sea Ranch Sanitation Zone  
c/o Sonoma County Water Agency  
404 Aviation Blvd.  
Santa Rosa, CA 95403

PRSRT STD  
US POSTAGE  
PAID  
PETALUMA, CA  
PERMIT 244



Hearing Date: May 20, 2014, 10:00 a.m.  
Hearing Location: 575 Administration Drive,  
Room 102A, Santa Rosa, CA

## Proposition 218 Notice

Included in this issue is the **Proposition 218 Notice** for the Sea Ranch Sanitation Zone's proposed Fiscal Year 2014-2015 sewer rates. The Notice with information about the proposed rates is included on pages 5-6 of this newsletter. The return protest form is located on page 7. Frequently asked questions about the Zone's budget process is on page 2.

For more information, visit  
[www.sonomacountywater.org/SRSZ](http://www.sonomacountywater.org/SRSZ).



Securing our Future by Investing in our Water Resources, Environment & Community  
[www.sonomacountywater.org/SRSZ](http://www.sonomacountywater.org/SRSZ)

