

Commissioner's Corner

The Expansion of Thurston PUD, One Year Later

By Chris Stearns, District 3



It was a year ago this month that Thurston PUD doubled its numbers of both water systems and employees. We also introduced new rates that help manage and operate the newly-acquired water systems and replace their infrastructure. Thanks in part to our new experienced employees, we used our 2018 budget funding to make dozens of repairs and replacements throughout our 273 water systems. I would like to share a handful of the numerous repairs and replacements we accomplished or are actively tackling in 2018.

- We replaced water treatment at two water systems and replaced components at 10 water systems. (Cost \$14,000)
- We replaced 47 pressure tanks and two air compressors. (\$30,000)
- We replaced and continue to replace source and service meters. (\$19,000)
- We replaced 16 well pumps and replaced or repaired 4 booster pumps and other miscellaneous well and booster pump components. (\$60,000)
- We installed one replacement well. (\$54,000)
- We installed water treatment per a Department of Health regulatory requirement. (\$70,000)

A year later, we still provide safe, reliable and affordable drinking water service, and continue our commitment to replacing aging infrastructure which means fewer equipment failures and service interruptions. One important note is that the figures above do not include labor costs which were over \$25,000.

We make the best use of our Asset Management Plan (AMP), a plan that estimates when certain water system components will reach the end of the useful life, and we have stayed true to our commitment to only using capital surcharge monies toward AMP infrastructure replacements.

Huge acquisitions and changes like the PUD underwent in the last year have moved the PUD toward positive changes including a larger field operations team. Having more water experts on our team creates more training opportunities that build a more knowledgeable workforce, and allows us to do more of the work "in house," saving the PUD money. The net effect of growth has increased dedication and morale from a merger that at first impression looked like anything, but easy to accomplish. I believe the PUD staff have handled it with great professionalism and dedication.

I would also like to extend a special thanks to all our customers for their patience and for exercising their right to voice their thoughts as we made this huge transition. We are committed to making this transition as smooth as possible and look forward to continue serving you for years to come.

About Commissioner Chris Stearns

Chris Stearns is the present President of the Board and was first elected to the Thurston PUD Commission in 2008. He is serving his second term. A long-time Thurston County resident, Chris is a retired Fisheries Biologist from the state Department of Fish & Wildlife and has served on the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission and worked with local tribes. He helped initialize critical work to protect salmon and steelhead habitat in the southern regions of our state. Chris was elected from District 3 and is honored to serve and represent PUD customers. He supports conservation of water resources within the County.

Thurston PUD Commissioners

District 1

Linda Oosterman


District 2


Russell E. Olsen


District 3


Chris Stearns


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The Value of Water Series: Ground Water Depletion

Groundwater is the largest source of usable, fresh water in the world. Although it gives the appearance of abundance, **surface water**, such as lakes and rivers, are scarce and inaccessible, but groundwater can meet domestic, agricultural and industrial water needs. Groundwater is the main drinking source for over half of the population in the United States. Astonishingly, the U.S. uses over 50 billion gallons a day on agriculture alone.

Most water experts compare groundwater to money kept in a bank account. If money is withdrawn at a faster rate than new money is deposited, there will eventually be overdrawing issues. Pumping water out of the ground at a faster rate than it is replenished causes a similar overdrawing on a water “bank account.” This effect is called **groundwater depletion** and it is becoming a growing concern for more and more water utilities and service providers.

Where the loss of surface water is a more visible issue (dried riverbeds, depleted lakes and reservoirs), groundwater depletion is an invisible issue because it occurs beneath our feet, out of sight.

Some of the negative effects of ground water depletion include:

Drying up of wells

Excessive pumping can lower the **aquifer**, sponge-like gravel and sand-filled underground reservoirs from which your water is pulled up, and can cause wells to no longer be able to reach ground water. To drill a well over 500 feet can cost over \$150,000.

Deterioration of water quality

All of the water in the ground is not fresh water. Very deep groundwater and water below sea level is ancient salt water. When this “fossil” saltwater comes into contact with groundwater, it is considered contaminated and will cost more to pump and filter, and there are times filtering this salt water is not a viable option. When a well dries up, the answer may not always be to dig a deeper well.

Increased pumping costs and system wear & tear

As the depth to pull water up from a well increases, the water must be lifted higher to reach the surface which uses more energy and puts more pressure on our systems to perform. In extreme cases, using such a well can be cost prohibitive.

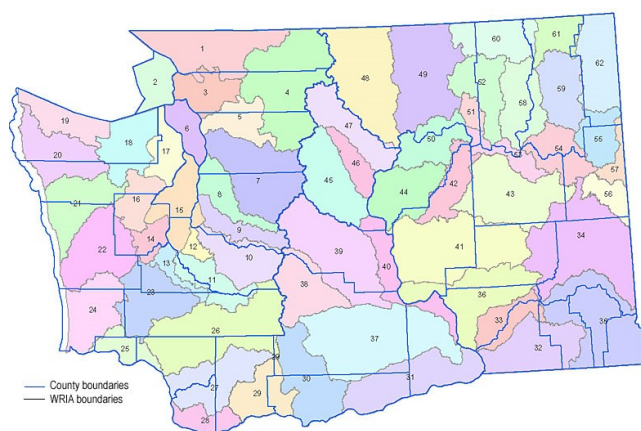
Reduced surface water supplies

Ground water and surface water are connected. When groundwater is overused, the lakes, streams and rivers connected to groundwater can also have their supply diminished.

What Thurston PUD is doing to reduce the impact on water supplies

Each PUD Commissioner is a member of Water Resource Inventory Area (WRIA) group that protects local water resources and habitat within your service area. PUD commissioners serve on the Nisqually, Chehalis and Deschutes Watershed groups. A watershed is an area of land that channels rainfall and snowmelt to creeks, streams, rivers and eventually to reservoirs, bays and the ocean. Along with other county, state, tribal and water utility leaders, PUD Commissioners serve on these groups to develop and manage planning boundaries within each watershed to address growing populations and increased water usage. Their involvement ensures you, as a PUD customer, are represented when it comes to how the county, state and federal

government manage water resources. Water supplies have a huge impact on the economy of our region such as dictating where communities are built and the types of businesses that move into our areas.



Ask a PUD Employee: What Does “Service Period” mean on My Monthly Bill?

Customer Service Representative Cathy Wise answers this month’s question. Cathy is responsible for processing payments, assisting with in-person payments and answering questions from customers over the phone.

On your monthly billing statement under the **Account Information** section, you can find the **Service Period**. The service period gives a range of two dates, typically the beginning and end of each month. This time frame is used to apply fixed monthly rates, fees and charges like Base Rate and the Capital Surcharge.

The Service Period is not used to apply your water consumption charges. The section below Account Information that is titled **Meter Reading** is the period you are charged for water consumption.

Our customer service team is available 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday to help you with any questions you may have. Call us toll free at (866) 357-8783.

Employee Spotlight: Erica Schilt, Senior Operations Specialist

Senior Operations Specialist Erica Schilt joined our team in October 2017, but has been in the water industry for over 12 years. Through the years she’s learned a lot about providing water to customers. “I used to think it was just as simple as turning on the faucet,” she said. “It is amazing how much it actually takes to get water to the tap.”

Over the years, Erica has watched the water industry transform into more efficient utilities through the use of more advanced technology. She enjoys learning about incorporating technological advancements that promote efficiency, data, and conservation, with conservation being a particularly special topic to her. “We are all blessed to be able to rely on having clean, drinkable water,” she said. “Conservation—even here on the rainy side of Washington—is the key to keeping our water supplies available for many generations to come.”

Outside of work, Erica likes to spend time with her family. She participates on athletic leagues including soccer and volleyball. She volunteers with the Thurston County Dog Project and is currently training with her dog to compete in Agility, a sport where owners direct their dogs through a pre-set course with a certain time limit.



Erica Schilt

Senior Operations
Specialist

Special Message from the Thurston County Auditor’s Office

November 6 General Election

On October 17, the Thurston County Auditor’s Office mailed ballots to registered voters for the November 6 General Election. The Auditor’s Office operates 28 safe and secure ballot drop boxes, including a brand new box at the Nisqually Reservation. A list of locations can be found online. Ballot boxes are open 24 hours a day and will close promptly at 8 p.m. on Tuesday, November 6 (Election Day). Mailed ballots must be postmarked by November 6. Ballots do not require postage. For more information, visit ThurstonVotes.org or call the Auditor’s Office at 360-786-5408.

Auditor’s Office Now Offers Passport Services

The Thurston County Auditor’s office now offers passport services. You can submit a new passport application in person, or pick up a renewal, amendment or other passport form. Adult passport renewals are a self mail-in process only. At this time, the Auditor’s Office can only process new passport applications and passport renewal applications for children under 16 or in other instances where adults don’t qualify for mail-in renewals. Learn more by visiting the Auditor’s website at www.thurstoncountywa.gov/auditor.

Preparing for Power Outages During PNW Storms

Stormy weather is always expected during the fall and winter months in the Pacific Northwest. We've come to expect high gusts of wind; sporadic, torrential downpours; and the occasional fallen tree. We've also come to expect power outages. Even if you don't expect an outage, it's a good idea to start piecing together a plan before a storm hits. Our water systems use electricity to pump water up from the ground and into your home, so if your power is out, most likely, your water service will be interrupted as well.

Here are some steps to prepare your household if the power goes out:

- Store at least one gallon of water per person, per day in a cool, dark place.
- Do you have a septic system? Find out if your water system has a generator at the well pump house. You can encounter major issues if your water system continues to pump, but you do not have power to your septic system.
- If an outage occurs, save your hot water. Some hot water tanks can keep hot/warm water for up to 24 hours.
- Insulate your pipes to keep them from freezing.
- Get an emergency kit that includes a flashlight, batteries, glow-in-the-dark sticks, a wind-up clock and a mylar blanket.
- Consider getting manual appliances or gadgets like a portable stove, manual can opener and matches.
- Stock up on dry and canned food.
- Make sure you know how to override any electricity-powered devices in the house like your garage door opener.
- Know where your circuit breaker or fuse box is located and know how to reset or change a fuse.



Upcoming Holiday Schedule

Thurston PUD will observe and be closed for the following holidays:

Monday, November 12—Veteran's Day

Thursday and Friday, November 22 and November 23—Thanksgiving Holiday

Tuesday, December 25—Christmas Holiday

(Special note: there will be no PUD Commissioner Board meeting on Christmas Day)

Tuesday, January 1—New Year's Day



We will still have on-call technicians available for water service emergencies. For water emergencies during holidays, please call our customer service number at (866) 357-8783.

Laying the Groundwork



PUD Field Technicians Justin Kadoun and Rick Sanchez pour concrete in preparation for the installation of water treatment at the Cedar Ridge Estates water system.

“Having more water experts on our team creates more training opportunities that build a more knowledgeable workforce, and allows us to do more of the work ‘in house,’ saving the PUD money.”

—Commissioner Chris Stearns, District 3