

Water customers demand answers Protestors unhappy with direction of NYWD

By Robert Summa / rsumma@appealdemocrat.com Apr 22, 2022



Protestors gathered in front of the North Yuba Water District office in Brownsville on Friday after a recent decision by the district not to deliver irrigation water this year.

Courtesy of Alton Wright

A little more than a week after North Yuba Water District and General Manager Jeff Maupin announced that there will not be a 2022 irrigation season for customers, water users staged a protest outside the district's office on Friday in Brownsville.

"I believe that the water is ours. It belongs to us," Donna Corson, a North Yuba Water District (NYWD) irrigation customer, said. "It's a water right. I believe that like the people of Ukraine, we need to stand up and stand for what we believe in."

Since taking over as general manager for the district, Maupin has been the focus of several complaints lodged against NYWD by customers and former board members for what they see as a complete mismanagement of the district and devastating decisions made by Maupin and the board such as the cutting of water delivery for irrigation customers.

At issue is the fact that despite Yuba County having a good supply of water, the way that water is or can be delivered has allegedly not been handled properly by Maupin and the NYWD board.

In a previous report about NYWD, Maupin said water issues that currently exist within NYWD are not a water supply problem, but a water conveyance problem.

“Even though we’ve had a few storms recently, we do not have the capacity or the means to deliver an irrigation season to irrigation customers during this drought year,” Maupin previously said.

Upon receiving an update on the 2022 irrigation season, Oregon House resident Marieke Furnee sent a letter to Yuba County District Five Supervisor Randy Fletcher about her concerns and continued fears of how the district is being run.

“I remember speaking to you (Fletcher) about this earlier, expressing my fear that such a thing could happen and you tried to instill trust in me, saying that you trusted that the Directors would make the best possible decision,” Furnee said in her letter. “It turns out that the Directors did not make any decision at all, this cancellation was not decided in a meeting. According to the newly adopted irrigation policy, the GM can cancel the season at will, without any input from anyone.”

On Friday, several NYWD customers and concerned citizens gathered in front of the NYWD office to raise awareness about the problems facing the people who reside within the district.

Despite the fact that the NYWD office was supposed to be open around the time the protest started, the doors were shut and those who wanted to speak with the district were essentially locked out. The protest essentially began when the NYWD Board of Directors were meeting, but the public was not able to attend in-person because of the district’s ability to hold meetings in a virtual environment due to COVID-19 concerns.

Several who were at the protest were unhappy that they have been continually shut out by Maupin and the board.

“They keep passing a resolution over and over again that allows them to have remote meetings,” Alton Wright, a Forbestown resident, said. “At this juncture of COVID they could at least have a meeting in there and allow a half dozen people in the room, but they won’t even do that.”

Wright said residents were protesting because of the “water shutoff with no rationale” and the lack of acceptance of help from other water districts such as South Feather Water and Power Agency.

While the decision to not have a 2022 irrigation season may only directly affect those types of customers, the lack of water delivery on the whole actually affects fire protection for a very vulnerable population in this region of the Yuba County foothills.

Corson said the excuses given by Maupin about why water has not been delivered are at odds with reality.

“Maupin has done away with giving irrigation water,” Corson said. “He’s made it so that we can never ever have it. He gives us reasons that he believes are his reasons, but really it’s his stubbornness.”

Of real concern for customers and an example given to show the type of mismanagement that has been occurring, is how the Forbestown Ditch has been maintained by NYWD. Forbestown Ditch is an unlined and open canal that conveys water for use by the district and its customers.

Several critics of Maupin and the district's board claim that the ditch has not been properly maintained since the district took over management of the ditch from the South Feather Water and Power Agency.

"They haven't done anything. North Yuba hasn't done a thing to improve that ditch. They haven't dug it out," Corson said. "They have a customer that lives on the ditch and he made the statement not so long ago that when South River was operating this ditch, every spring I would hear their machine come and start cleaning it out. I've never once heard it since North Yuba took it over. They do not clean it out."

Corson said Maupin has not been receptive to concerns brought by some customers.

"He doesn't have to. He has a board that does what he wants," Corson said. "We haven't been able to get an elected board that will help us."

Karolyn McCall, also a NYWD irrigation customer, said the effects of not getting water have had dramatic effects in the running of her ranch.

"I am a farmer. They don't believe there's any farmers down where we're at, we don't need irrigation. Every meeting I've ever come to here, I've never felt represented. ... In 11 years I've only had two years of full irrigation," McCall said. "My ranch should be a good enough ranch with good enough grass, good enough grazing ground, good enough soil, that I should only have to feed hay about 60 days a year, max. I'm feeding hay 12 months a year. I spent over \$12,000 on hay last year. I should only spend about \$2,000 on hay. That's how much it's costing me every year."

McCall said if things don't change with NYWD and its delivery of irrigation water, she will be forced to sell her ranch.

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