SWEETWATER SPRINGS WATER DISTRICT

TO: Board of Directors **AGENDA NO. V-B**

FROM: Steve Mack, General Manager

Meeting Date: January 2, 2014

SUBJECT: CURRENT DROUGHT SITUATION

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Receive a report on the current drought situation.

FISCAL IMPACT: None

DISCUSSION:

The lack of rain and its effect on the regional (and statewide) water supply has been in the news recently. Lake Mendocino is at low levels and can't sustain its required releases without additional inflows and Lake Sonoma is at adequate water levels but the lake is limited in the maximum flow it can release – there's enough water there to make up for Lake Mendocino but that water can't be released in high enough amounts. Figure 3 below from the General Manager's Report shows the small amounts of rain we have received this rain season compared to prior ones and it affirms the low rain totals.

Last week the Sonoma County Water Agency (SCWA) petitioned the State Water Resources Control Board for a Temporary Urgency Change (TUC) to change the Hydrologic Index to be keyed to Lake Mendocino water levels through this summer. Russian River minimum flows are set by a Hydrologic Index which is based on water levels in Lake Pillsbury on the Eel River according to State Water Resources Control Board Decision 1610. As we've discussed in the past, because of changes in the releases from Lake Pillsbury to the Lake Mendocino and the change in downstream releases required by the Russian River Biological Opinion, the current Hydrologic Index does not make sense for the current Russian River flow needs. This is particularly true in a year with below average runoff into Lake Mendocino and the downstream of the lake. If granted (and I believe it will be granted), the TUC changes will allow SCWA to immediately go to a critically dry release regimen, saving some water in Lake Mendocino for later releases, but still leaving upstream storage in bad shape if this rainfall pattern doesn't change.

What does this mean for Sweetwater Springs Water District? If this very dry situation continues through the Spring, what will our water supply look like? We don't foresee a big impact for us. The District's maximum pumping is equivalent to about 2 cubic feet per second (cfs) while minimum flows in past years have only barely touched 50 cfs. It may be that even 50 cfs will be a struggle to maintain this summer, however, we believe something will be released downstream of the SCWA pumps and as long as the summer dams

are up, water levels near the El Bonita well field should be similar to past summers. The river water level near the Monte Rio well field is controlled by the estuary level and that is controlled by the sand barrier – a dry summer may encourage the sand barrier to stay intact for a longer period of time than usual. We don't expect a noticeable change in water quality with lower flows.

Of course, this dry period could end at any time. One or two atmospheric river storms could fill up the reservoirs and get the tributaries running again – it will take much less of a weather change to end the drought in our watershed than ending the current statewide drought. It will rain hard again; we just don't know when.
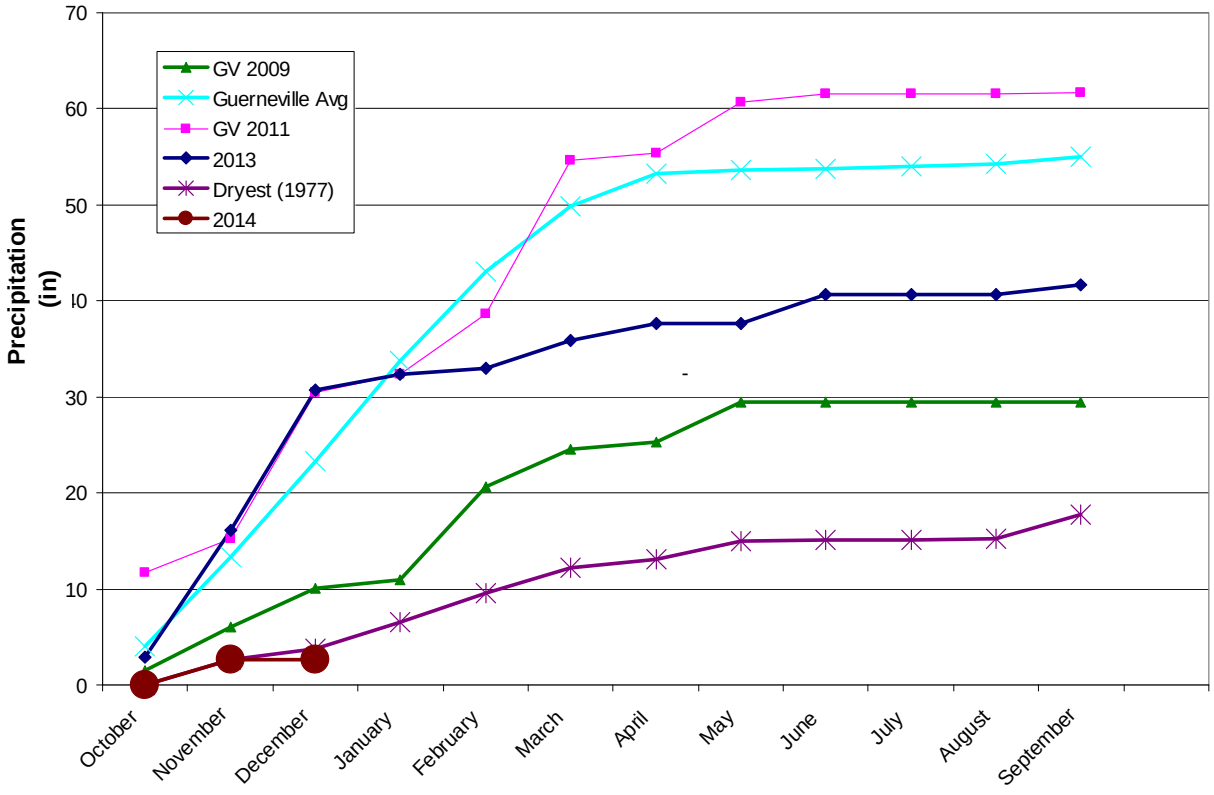
Figure 3. Guerneville Cumulative Monthly Rainfall