



## News Release

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### **OPINION: 2021 Highlights from your Water and Sewer District**

South Lake Tahoe, CA (December 28, 2021) – Not to be outdone by 2020, 2021 delivered fires, evacuations, more COVID, big winter storms and power outages. And once again, our tough, little mountain town came together to overcome and carry on. The South Tahoe Public Utility District was proud to play an important role in meeting these big challenges and consistently providing safe, clean drinking water, plenty of water for firefighting, and reliable wastewater services to protect our precious environment. As we turn the page on 2021, I'd like to share four highlights and a look ahead from your water and sewer district.

1. **Fire Readiness and Response** – As the Caldor Fire entered the Tahoe Basin, our water system played a critical role in the firefighting effort. When the entire community evacuated, District staff worked around the clock to fix leaks, keep the wells pumping and water tanks full. We worked closely with fire personnel throughout the fire, repopulation, and restoration efforts to make sure you returned home to clean drinking water and a fully functioning wastewater system. In recent years, the District invested in high-capacity wells and booster stations, upsized waterlines, additional fire hydrants, and water system monitoring technology which optimized our firefighting capabilities and protected our community. Not to be overlooked, the Tamarack Fire also presented challenges as it burned 650 acres within our recycled water facilities in Alpine County. With significant emergency planning and timely investments, your water and sewer staff were able to overcome these challenges with hard work, commitment, community partnership, and maybe a little help from lady luck.
2. **Collaboration** – Throughout the year, we continued to work with community partners to tackle some of the greatest challenges facing our community. Our Board of Directors updated District policies and launched a program to help lower the cost to build affordable housing. Working with California Tahoe Conservancy and the US Forest Service we secured grant funds to plan and implement hazardous fuel reduction at all 80 field stations by the end of 2022. Partnering with the City of South Lake Tahoe, we are using COVID-19 grant funds to install an additional 37 fire hydrants throughout the City over the next 2 years. These efforts help to protect our community from wildfire. We are actively working with TRPA, the League to Save Lake Tahoe, Tahoe Resource Conservation District, regional water districts, Lake Valley Fire and other regional fire agencies to advocate and obtain additional funding for critical fire suppression infrastructure.
3. **Water Conservation** – In an era of prolonged drought, we advanced the mantra of working smarter, not harder this year to conserve our most precious natural resource, water. Using satellite leak detection, we identified and repaired 22 leaks in our water distribution system conserving 66 million gallons of water this year alone. We used remote meter data to alert 4,276 customers of water leaks and provided conservation rebates and services to save an additional 28 million gallons. These programs are available at [stpud.us](http://stpud.us). We are looking forward



to a big winter to help refill our lake, streams, and groundwater aquifers, and plenty of snow for winter revelers.

4. Proactive Planning – This year we expanded our data driven approach to assess the condition of our system assets. With 600 miles of water/sewer mains, over 80 field stations, and a 7.7 million gallon per day wastewater treatment plant, it is critical that we prioritize the repair and replacement of these aging assets worth nearly \$2 billion. We inspected the condition of 1,900 fire hydrants, 200 water/sewer pipes crossing streams, 17 miles of wastewater mainlines, and the electrical, structural, and underground piping at the wastewater treatment plant and field facilities. These assessments are the building blocks for future planning and allow us to prioritize investments to make timely, cost-effective decisions and avoid expensive emergencies.

With a couple crazy years in the rearview, we are looking forward to 2022 with tremendous optimism. We have more waterline and hydrant projects coming for more community-wide fire flow. We will be starting the rehabilitation and modernization of our largest sewer pump stations and critical components of the wastewater treatment plant to protect our sensitive environment from sewer spills. And we will be developing a new recycled water strategic plan – looking at innovation and new technologies to better serve the needs of our community. As the lowest cost water and sewer provider in the Tahoe Basin, we continue to aggressively pursue grant funding with over \$7.4 million in grant applications already in the works for capital improvement projects, drought readiness, energy efficiency, and natural disaster preparedness.

We have a large, complex system for such a small town. Operations, maintenance, and financing repairs and replacements continue to be a massive challenge. More than ever, we are looking for better ways to deliver clean, reliable, cost-effective water, wastewater, and recycled water services to you, your family, and our beautiful environment.

On behalf of District staff and our Board of Directors, we wish you a happy, healthy, prosperous 2022.

John Thiel, General Manager