

Groveland Community Services District Board of Directors Report

2014 Customer Survey

June 01, 2015, Revision 4 (Final Published Edition)

By: Directors Steve Perreira and Scott Wemmer

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Background:

The GCSD Board Policy Manual requires the Board to Survey Customers at least annually. This is the first survey. It was conducted by inserting the one page survey into each customer's bill. This is not a scientific survey. It is likely that the people who have responded are more pro-active and interested in the business of Groveland Community Services District than the typical customer. 3200 surveys were sent out, one to each customer. About 2/3 of customers receive water service, and about 1/3 get both water and sewer service. The survey focuses on Customer Service, Cost of Service, Customer Participation, and Water Conservation. We did not inquire about Fire Protection services that are now under management contract with CalFIRE.

The Water District is dominated by Pine Mountain Lake sub-division where most customers are part-time residents. Summer Vacation tourism provides a seasonal population surge and economic boom. There are only about 3300 full-time residents according to the 2010 US Census.

Summary:

Customers give GCSD very good ratings for both field and office customer service. Most customers prefer to receive information with their bills (rather than newspaper, internet, etc.) Few customers are interested in attending Board Meetings, those that are prefer evenings, if not that, then Saturday.

The main matter is this – cost of service. Of paramount concern is the high fixed monthly rate for water and/or sewer service before the first gallon of water is used – as expressed over and over again by vacation home owners who only infrequently use their homes but have to pay a substantial price every month for the fixed portion of their bill (typically \$50 for water only customers, \$130 for those with both water and sewer service). Customers tell us that our water and sewer rates are high compared to other comparable services. They are very concerned about the debt service portion of their bills. Frugal water users complained about subsidizing water wasting residents, businesses, and institutions by means of high fixed rates. Many customers noted that the rate system provides little incentive to promote water conservation because the water consumption “variable rate” portion of their bill is typically dwarfed by the high “fixed rate” monthly charge for water and sewer services.

For a typical customer conservation is hardly worth the effort. For instance, a water wise retired couple in a home with water service only, with no landscaping, could get by on 100 gallons per day (3000 gallons per month). This adds about \$7 of water volume use to their monthly bill with a \$50 fixed charge for a total of \$57. If they use twice as much water, or 200 gallons per day, their bill includes about \$20 in water volume use added to the \$50 fixed charge, that's only \$70 per month. The reward for saving water is minimal, in this case, for saving 3000 gallons in a month, it's \$13, about 40 cents per day.

Response Statistics:

3200 customer surveys were issued with the monthly water bill (no tracking, anonymous)
643 surveys were returned (20%)

Question #1: *What is your residency status within the District?*

48.6% Full Time Resident (314 responses)
50.4% Part Time Resident (326 responses)
1.0% Vacant Lot Owner (6 responses)

Question #2: *Based on your experience, how would you rate your services?*

(1 being unsatisfactory, 5 being excellent)

Your Water Service: (Note – 596 responses)

5.2% 1 (unsatisfactory)
2.5% 2
14.3% 3 (average)
31.0% 4
47.0% 5 (excellent)

Your Wastewater (Sewer) Service: (Note – 375 responses – many say just use the word sewer)

5.3% 1 (unsatisfactory)
2.9% 2
15.2% 3 (average)
30.4% 4
46.1% 5 (excellent)

Question #3: *If you have telephoned the District, are phone calls answered promptly and professionally? (Note: 407 responses)*

5.2% 1 (unsatisfactory)
4.7% 2
10.6% 3 (average)
26.8% 4
52.8% 5 (excellent)

Question #4: *Compared to other utilities' field response (electric, gas, phone, etc.), how would you rate the District's response level? (Note: 457 responses)*

3.9% 1 (unsatisfactory)
5.0% 2
14.0% 3 (average)
30.4% 4
46.6% 5 (excellent)

Question #5: Compared to other utility companies (electric, gas, phone, etc.), the District's rates are?
(Note: 596 responses – many suggest to only compare to other water utilities)

Your Water Service: (Note – 596 responses)

1.7%	Low
37.1%	Average
61.2%	High

Your Wastewater (Sewer) Service: (Note – 373 responses)

1.7%	Low
37.1%	Average
61.2%	High

Question #6: Please indicate your preferred method to receive information: (Note: Many customers chose more than one method)

85.8%	Newsletter (sent with your bill)
7.8%	Newspaper
7.2%	Website
17.9%	Email
2.0%	Other

Question #7: Are you interested in attending Board Meetings? (Note – 597 responses)

11.4%	Yes
88.6%	No

If yes, what would be the best time for you to attend a Board meeting? (68 responses)

10.3%	Morning
8.8%	Afternoon
36.8%	Evening
10.3%	Anytime
66.2%	Weekday
20.6%	Saturday (no one wanted Sunday)

Question #8: By State Law, the District must cut water use by 20% by 2020. What water conservation methods are you going to take? What suggestions might you have? (Note – 494 responses)

See Special Report below, Titled “2014 Customer Survey, Water Conservation Question #8”

Question #9: Any other comments and/or suggestions concerning the District? (Note – Many responses)

Other comments and suggestions included many customers discussing:

- 1) High Debt Service on Bills
- 2) More ways to conserve Water
- 3) Suggestions imploring the District to conserve / ration water fairly

End of Report Main Report Below, a more detailed report on Survey Q? #8, Water Conservation.

2014 Customer Survey, Water Conservation Question #8

May 27, 2015, Revision 4

Written by: Director Steve Perreira

Question #8: *By State Law, the District must cut water use by 20% by 2020. What water conservation methods are you going to take? What suggestions might you have? (Note – 494 responses, 15.4%)*

Note: On the survey, customers were provided only one area to respond to both inquiries in Question #8, those being “what are you going to do?” and “what suggestions might you have?” Because of this error in the presentation of the survey, we have no way to separate customer actions from their suggestions. Responses are therefore compiled as a single group of combined actions and suggestions. We apologize for not being able to distinguish between the two responses. Neither do we distinguish between the minority of full-time residents and the majority of part-time residents

Summary:

It is clear from reading the written responses that many, many customers have already, or are soon to take water conservation actions – the majority of those that responded appear to be pro-active.

Most customers are part-timers, many of whom occupy their residents for only a few weeks a year. Many other vacation homes are rentals, occupied by short-time rent paying vacationers who have little incentive to conserve water. Most full-time residents appear to be active in water conservation, limiting outdoor landscaping and using water wisely indoors. For example, many residents painstakingly collect used interior greywater in buckets and use it for plants both indoors and outdoors.

Responses by Category:

494 Customers responded to Question #8 with, for the most part, multiple actions and suggestions offered. Responses are reported by percentage with respect to the number of responses to Question #8. The number in parenthesis following the percentage is the actual number of responses.

Current Water Conservation Situation Expressed (unsolicited):

- 17% (82): **Already Conserving**, but offering NO specific Actions or Suggestions
- 19% (92): **Not here often**, NO incentive to conserve (especially part-timers & sewer customers)

Interior Water Use (inside the home):

- 28% (137) **Shower & Bathing:**
 - 16% (78): Shorter Showers (and shut off water when lathering)
 - 5.9% (29): Install(ed) Low Flow Shower Head
 - 5.1% (25): Shower / Bathe less often (such as every other day)
 - 1.0% (4): Shower with spouse or friend
 - 0.2% (1): Bathe in water not so deep
- 18% (90): **Toilet:**
 - 11% (53): Install(ed) Low Flow Toilet
 - 7.5% (37): Flush Toilet less often (yellow – let it mellow, brown – flush it down)
- 13% (65): **Clothes Washing:** (New, Water Efficient Clothes Washer or larger loads)
- 10% (50): **Bathroom & Kitchen Sinks:**
 - 6.5% (32): Turn off bathroom sink when lathering, shaving, brushing teeth, etc.

- 3.0% (15): Aerate Sink Faucets for lower flow, more effective rinsing
- 0.7% (3): Stop Using / Remove Kitchen Sink Garbage Disposal
- 10% (49): **Dish Washing:** (New, Water Efficient, full-loads, by hand, rinse in bowl, etc.)

Re-Using Water from Inside the Home (Greywater):

- 8.5% (42): **Water from Interior re-used on interior or exterior plants:**
 - 4.2% (21): before warm-up, Catch(es) cold shower & kitchen sink water for plants
 - 4.2% (21): direct(ing) Greywater from interior to exterior landscaping

Exterior Water Use:

- 47% (232): **Landscape Irrigation & Drought Tolerance, Not washing Driveways, Decks, etc.:**
 - 25% (125): Less or No Landscaping needing irrigation
 - 5.3% (26): Catch Rainwater from the Roof & Store for landscape irrigation
 - 4.2% (21): Install(ed) Drip Irrigation
 - 3.6% (18): Cultivate only Native, drought tolerant plants
 - 3.2% (16): Less or No Car washing (or go to carwash)
 - 3.0% (15): Don't Spray down driveways, sidewalks, decks, patios, etc.
 - 1.5% (6): Remove or Stop Watering Lawn (or replace with astro-turf)
 - 0.4% (2): Mulching to reduce irrigation evaporation
 - 0.4% (2): Composting Toilet
 - 0.2% (1): Container Vegetable Gardening

Policies – Education, Enforcement, Incentives, Rebates, Water Rate:

- 13% (63): Education, Rebates, Incentives, Enforcement, Rate System, Etc.
 - 3.8% (19): Education & Outreach on Water Conservation
 - 1.8% (9): Incentives and Rebates for Water Conserving Fixture & Appliances
 - 1.2% (6): Audit High Volume Users
 - 1.2% (6): Higher Rates for Wasters, Lower Rates for Conservers
 - 1.0% (5): There are No incentives to Conserve
 - 1.2% (6): Require Part-Timers to turn off water main when away
 - 0.8% (4): Fine Water Wasters
 - 0.4% (2): Get a new water source (more of it)
 - 0.4% (2): Sur-Charge higher water rate for vacation rental homes
 - 0.4% (2): Leak check plumbing, including toilets
 - 0.2% (1): Mandatory Rationing
 - 0.2% (1): Provide more awareness of water usage

Miscellaneous:

- 8.5% (42): **Not Sure what to do, Move away, Will Try to use less, Etc.**
 - 2.2% (11): Not sure what I can do?
 - 0.8% (4): I will NOT Conserve (because I pay a lot for so little)
 - 0.8% (4): Drink Beer & Wine instead of Water
 - 0.8% (4): Take Laundry Home (from PML vacation home)
 - 0.8% (4): Acquire or Use a Well
 - 0.6% (3): Will try to use Less Water
 - 0.6% (3): Can't Control what my renters use

- 0.6% (3): Buy Bottled Water
- 0.4% (2): Sell Home and Move Away
- 0.2% (1): Empty Swimming Pool
- 0.2% (1): Cistern should be allowed without County permit
- 0.2% (1): Reward water saving children

Written Comments on Water and Sewer Rates related to Water Conservation:

- 14.9% (94): **Fixed Rate Too High for Water & Sewer (now \$50 for Water + \$80 for Sewer, per mo.)**
- 4.1% (26): **Rates lower/much lower in my permanent home in Bay Area, etc.**
- 4.1% (26): **I hardly use any water as a part-timer, what more can I do?**
- 3.3% (21): **District has too much Debt/Bond service on Water/Sewer Bills**
- 2.4% (15): **Variable Water Rate too low to promote/encourage conservation**
- 1.3% (8): **I conserve already, don't punish me, don't reward wasters with blanket 20% cuts**
- 2.4% (1): **Variable Water Rate too high (w.r.t. the 4 Tier rate system, 1/5 to 4/5 cent per gallon)**

Note: Section above has percentages calculated based on all 632 surveys submitted by customers.

Sample Customer Quotations:

GCSO Staff Performance:

“Just recently have overheard a conversation by several locals complimenting the new GCSO Manager, Board of Directors, & New Fire Dept. How refreshing to hear great things about GCSO , instead of the hateful comments.”

“We lost water pressure a couple of weeks ago. Called front gate (after hours). It was repaired immediately.”

“Good people working for you, very helpful, in and out of the building.”

“After being a customer for over 18 years, you FINALLY appear to be headed in the right direction!”

“Keep up the good work”

“Crooks” (a few statements like this brief one generally pointed the finger at prior management)

“(paraphrased) Full time employees, such as previous GM (alleged here), are paid well and should not be allowed to be distracted by moonlighting / second jobs.”

“The boys in the field get it done!”

“Very helpful and professional.” (office staff).

Water Conservation:

“Our current usage of 35 gallons per day per person cannot go much lower unless we want to stink.”

“Find an economical way for all homes to use gray water for irrigation.”

“Catch water from rain (from roof)”

“We lose water waiting for the hot water to get hot. Perhaps info regarding remedies would be a good thing, & sources to call who can remedy the problem.”

“I hardly use much water but I pay a lot.”

“Water usage conservation monitored & enforces as much as legal – still see people washing cars. I believe they think, ‘Oh, we get all the water we need here.’ They don’t see the state and global issues! EDUCATION – EDUCATION!”

“Rain Barrels to catch run-off from roof to use in the yard. We are already doing all other suggested things including saving basin water.”

“Allow us to add collection sinks to our properties with(out) county intervention, excessive costs, etc. Encourage (aquaponic?) gardening.”

“Install greywater, plant drought resistant landscaping.”

“We are already conserving, there is not much more else we can do.” (full time resident)

“We all must be more aware of our usage.”

“Create incentives for low flow toilets and shower heads, and as well, for water conserving washing machines. Keep the water conserving message in front of the people.”

“Allow greywater use for summer garden needs.”

“Alert people who are using too much water outside, i.e. rinsing driveways, over-watering, etc. and fine them.”

“Less watering, shorter showers.”

“Less clothes washing, bucket watering of plants, fewer showers & shorter.”

“Pee outside, drink beer (instead of water).”

“Dog park water basins are frequently overflowing – need a different type of shut-off valve or some other gadget.”

“I will try to use less water.”

“Not growing our lawn.” (response to how to conserve water from a full time resident.)

“Rainwater collection system.”

“I have no outside landscaping, a minimal garden that I hand water, we time our showers, do not run water during the dish washing or tooth brushing. Run only full loads of laundry. Maybe I can install low flow showerheads? No leaks noted in the toilets or system.”

“I will not be conserving because I use so little to start with.” (part time resident, water & sewer service)

“I think we’re doing great at 1600 gallons per month, don’t you?.”

“Those who use less water should be rewarded by being charged less, even if it’s under the minimum (lowest tier). Stop penalizing the part time users. It gives them no reason to use less when they are there.”

“Reduce watering to landscaping, plant native plants, install water saving fixtures, flush wisely.”

“Turn off water when washing hands & brushing teeth, low flow when rinsing dishes, ‘military’ shower.”

“Collecting water when I shower and when it rains to water my plants.”

Water and Sewer Rates (almost all critical of high rates):

“Extremely high!! (water & sewer rates) \$135/mo. even if we use zero water!! We feel hostage to GCSD! Compared to other Districts, GCSD is ‘exhorbitant!’” (part time customer)

(Water and sewer service rates are) three times my previous rate!” (full time resident)

“(Fixed) Rate too high – use \$2 worth of water (volume use) and bill is \$50.” (part time resident, water only)

“We haven’t been there in almost 5 months, yet my bill does not reflect.”

“I’m only there for 3 months of the year, yet my water bills equal my primary residence. \$129 a month for zero use is too much!!” (water and sewer service customer)

“For someone like us who use almost no water 9 months of the year, your rates are unreasonable.”

“I have a \$130 bill per month when I don’t use any water. Charges should depend more on consumption rates.” (water and sewer service customer)

“My total bill per month when we’re not here, averages \$130. I think that’s extremely high.” (water and sewer service customer)

“I pay \$130/month for a cabin where no water may be used for months? Ridiculous!”

“Had I known the rates for sewer, I would have bought a home with septic.”

“Compared to water & sewer bills for properties we own in Santa Clara Co., Santa Cruz, & Menlo Park, your bills are excessively front loaded (high fixed costs but low consumption costs). This is biased & unfair to part time owners at PML & burdens low consumers more than high consumers, not a wise policy if you want to encourage conservation! Restructure rates by lowering fixed costs & increasing consumption rates.”

“Out of town, not used in 6 months, \$51 per month, for what?”

“We live in Aptos, have rentals in Sacramento and Watsonville – but these rates are highest”

“Hard to pay \$53 for no water use in February. Need a better rate structure.” (part time water customer)

“Sorry I bought a lot with water & sewer service (rates) maybe the highest in CA or the USA.”

“The base rate of \$51/mo. seems high. It might be wise to reduce the base rate and charge much more per gallon. I could use help with graywater & drip irrigation systems.” (water service only full time resident)

“We are very unhappy with the Districts (water and sewer) rates & will be one of the deciding factors if we put our PML home up for sale.” (part time resident).

“Be more understanding of part time residents.”

“If I never use my water allotment, you should not penalize me for doing right ... all the time!!!”

“(High water and sewer rates) What can one do about it?”

“It’s water! not uranium! Your rates are way too high! You should be ashamed of yourself!” (water only customer, full time resident)

“I don’t have wastewater service, whatever that is ...” (GCSD needs to use common word “SEWER”)

“Your (water & sewer) rates are more than 2x the rates of the water district where I live full time.”

“We pay nearly 5x the (water & sewer) rate compared to our house in the bay area ... would not have bought had we known ... use less than 350 gallons and paid \$133, that is robbery!!!” (part time resident)

“Your rates are nothing short of criminal.”

“High compared to the valley, but everything is higher up here.” (full time water & sewer customer)

“Figure out how to lower sewer rates.” (customer rates water service charge as average, but sewer high)

“This months bill is \$132, half \$81 is sewer related charges, that seems extremely high.” (part time res.)

"Many months the cabin is not used and water is shut off. Why do I have to pay \$125 approx. during those months?"

"I am and always have been appalled at the cost of service before using one drop of water."

"I use less than 50 gallons a month but it still costs me \$50 some dollars."

"I am curious as to when our 1996 - 98 bond will end and about the 2007 debt service, are these forever and if so why?"

"I don't have sewer service currently. However, we are considering buying another home on the wastewater system and the cost of \$150/month is a deterrent on a fixed income. Also, we use very little water on our visits, but it currently costs us \$51/mo. It was higher?"

"\$157 per month, one person, no outdoor watering – ridiculous, may have to move."

"(Water and sewer rates are) high due to high fixed rate, bonds, & debt service."

"Way too high (water and sewer rates), too many big pensions and wasteful spending."

"Due to added fees (water bonds, debt service, etc.) we pay less per month at our permanent residence with more people using water, more watering of lawn, flowers, and (bushes?)."

"Charges are too much. Reduce charges." (Water and Sewer service customer)

"(Water & Sewer service) just costs too much! Won't have anything outside that needs watering – work on getting rates down."

"(Water and Sewer service rates are) too high!! Not in line with other districts. Salaries not in line for small community."

"(Water rate) very high, \$50 per month and no water used." (customer with water service only)

"Need more customers on the system to reduce the per unit amount."

"(Water & sewer rates are) way too high because of bond debt."

"I pay \$137 a month for approx. 155 gallons – there 4 days a month. Going to have to sell." (Water & Sewer service customer)

"Way too high for sewer! It's just so expensive. \$129/mo. even when no one is there."

"This is way to expensive, much cheaper in Sonora."

"We are part time – we use very little compared to what we are charged."

"Our full time residence water bill is much lower than vacation residence?? We don't use much water. It should be charged by use, not a flat rate. We pay \$51/month for months with no one there."

"I understand why rates are high."

"We pay more for these (water and sewer) services that we use on average 3 days a month compared with our full time residence."

"... we pay \$155/mo. even when gone... in the valley, there bill goes from \$38 to \$45/mo. and people scream in the newspaper with battles at town meetings ... too many employees .. if this were a private company, 100% confident fewer employees."

"(paraphrased) If we are part time now, then move in full-time later, will we be penalized for higher water use?."

"Remove the fixed rate and debt service and include it in the (volume use) rate. Also price based on availability, like gas, in order to make people understand its (water's) value."

"I have relatives in Oregon, Illinois, Montana, Washington. Ours is the highest cost due to fixed rate charges & bonds – you are pricing the retirees out of the area, more foreclosures!"

Miscellaneous Comments:

Regarding poor logic of question #5 "How do you compare electricity (gas, phone, etc.) to water service. Strange question."

Regarding poor logic of question #5 "Comparing the cost of water to the cost of other utilities makes no sense."

"Keep Pine Mountain Lake clean and uncontaminated."

"Consider billing every 2 months.... like most other districts."

"Don't send envelopes to auto pay customers."

END OF REPORT