

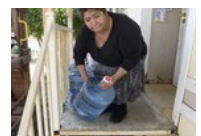
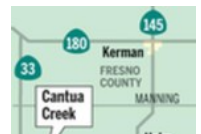
Water bills for Cantua Creek will be paid by state

By Marc Benjamin



Leticia Fernandez uses only bottled water for drinking as do most of the residents of Cantua Creek. Here she hauls a five-gallon bottle into her home on Feb. 27, 2015. MARK CROSSE — THE FRESNO BEE |[Buy Photo](#)

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- *Short-term relief coming to pay for Cantua Creek water.*
- *Residents previously told county they couldn't afford higher bills.*
- *Water was going to run out in the middle of May.*



The state has provided Fresno County with \$120,000 to buy water for residents of Cantua Creek.

The community of about 71 homes and 275 residents was going to be without water beginning next month if funding was not found to pay for Cantua Creek's water supply.

Fresno County supervisors will be advised about the state funding plan Tuesday and discuss moving ahead with other plans for Cantua Creek's water issues at a meeting on May 5.

The funding is coming from the state Water Resources Control Board.

But the money amounts to a short-term stopgap measure, said John Thompson, the county's deputy director of resources and administration.

"We are going to try to work with the state and the residents," he said. "We have to work with the residents to make sure they are conserving as best they possibly can."

The money will cover the district's overdue bills from March 2014 to the end of June. The water was going to run out in the middle of May if the bills weren't paid.

Supervisor Brian Pacheco said the county had petitioned the state for money and was rejected. After the county declared a drought emergency, a second grant application was submitted and it was approved by the state, he said.

"This will bring Cantua Creek current on their financial obligations," Pacheco said.

Another grant application was submitted to pay for water in the area until a piping project for Cantua Creek and neighboring El Porvenir is completed. The piping project will bring water to both communities. Today, they are each on separate systems.

Residents were facing water bills of more than \$102 per month, up from \$72, and they rejected the higher bills in their county service area election. A majority of residents said they could not afford the increase.

Their water comes from Westlands Water District, which sells the water at market rates to the county. The county then distributes the water to the community and charges based on the rate it's charged by Westlands. The Westlands rate jumped from \$348 per acre-foot last year to \$1,144 per acre-foot at the time of the election. The rate has dropped to about \$903 per acre foot today.

Thompson said county officials will speak to residents about conservation, something they did after the election. If residents reduce their use to 50 gallons per day per person, water bills for the average household would only rise about \$13 to \$14 per month.

Cantua Creek Resident Leticia Fernandez said she was relieved to learn that the water would continue to flow and that money was available to pay the bills for Cantua Creek's water.

"It's a really good thing," she said. "It's a short-term solution because it's only until the end of this (fiscal) year. Then, we have to plan for a long-term solution, but we're happy, of course."

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