CITY OF MILLS
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TO: Mills City Council

FROM: Mills Water Treatment

SUBJECT: Water Restrictions

Background -

The City of Mills implemented water use restrictions in response to a call on the river that limited the City's ability to fully utilize portions of its available water supply, including surface water rights and groundwater rights operating under the influence of surface water. The restrictions were intended to reduce demand and preserve operational flexibility while water supplies were constrained.

The river call was lifted on May 1, 2026. However, the restrictions have remained in place through the beginning of the irrigation season.

During the past week, while restrictions have remained in effect, the Mills Water Treatment Plant produced an average of approximately 914,250 gallons per day. During the same period in 2025, when no restrictions were in place, average production was approximately 1.4 million gallons per day. This represents a nearly 35 percent reduction and demonstrates that the restrictions have been effective in curbing demand. Operational observations suggest much of the reduction has resulted from decreased irrigation at municipal parks.

Considerations -

The Mills Water Treatment Plant is capable of producing up to approximately 2 million gallons per day on a limited basis, and current production remains well below that level. However, the plant is more than 40 years old, and much of the original infrastructure remains in service. While the facility has been maintained and upgraded over time, portions of the system, including the river-based infiltration gallery, are aging and require increasing attention. The City's reliance on groundwater production has also increased over time.

While the system can meet higher demand, sustained periods of elevated production place additional stress on treatment equipment, wells, pumps, and supporting infrastructure. As a result, the question before the Council is less about water availability and more about how aggressively the City wishes to manage demand in order to preserve infrastructure and maintain operational flexibility during the summer months.

Options –

Option 1 – Continue Current Restrictions

Maintaining the current restrictions would preserve the greatest available capacity and place the least stress on the water system. This option provides the greatest operational flexibility but continues restrictions on residents, businesses, and parks despite the river call having been lifted.

Option 2 – Remove Residential and Commercial Restrictions While Maintaining Park Restrictions

This option would restore normal water use for residents and businesses while continuing to limit irrigation at municipal parks. Because much of the recent demand reduction appears to be tied to park irrigation, this approach would likely retain a meaningful portion of the current capacity benefit while reducing impacts on the public. Parks may brown during the summer months, but root systems are expected to remain viable.

Option 3 – Remove All Restrictions

This option would return all users to normal water use and eliminate impacts to parks, businesses, and residents. However, demand would likely increase toward historical seasonal levels, placing greater demands on aging infrastructure and reducing available operational capacity. If production approaches undesirable levels for an extended period, restrictions may need to be reinstated.

Conclusion

The restrictions have been effective in reducing water demand, lowering average daily production from approximately 1.4 million gallons per day to approximately 914,250 gallons per day. At the same time, the river call that prompted the restrictions has been lifted.

The decision before the Council is therefore not primarily a question of water supply, but rather a policy choice regarding infrastructure preservation, operational flexibility, and customer convenience. Continuing restrictions will preserve additional capacity and reduce stress on the system, while relaxing or removing restrictions will restore normal water use but may increase production demands as the summer season progresses.