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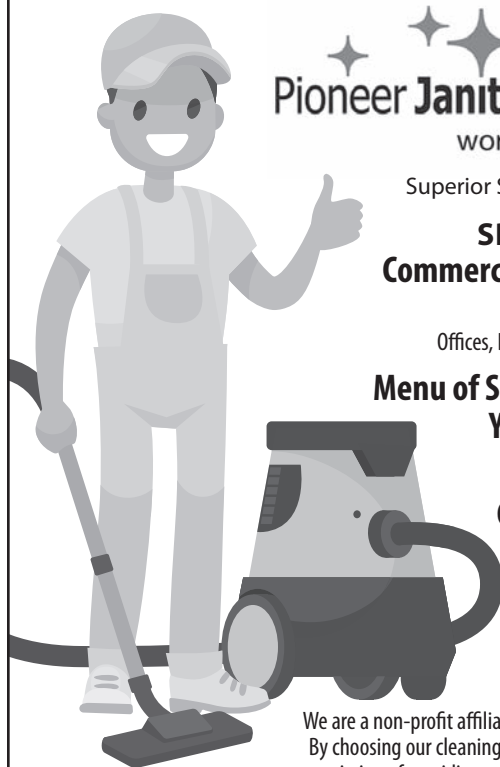
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PUBLIC WORKS

Wastewater treatment plant inundated with increased load



The “replacement cycle is exploding” at the wastewater treatment plant post-Camp Fire, according to Erik Gustafson, public works director of operations and maintenance.

Below: Raul Baca, the plant’s lone electrical and environmental supervisor, says he’s been making more frequent repairs since the fire, and other projects have been put on hold to meet the increased demand.

PHOTOS BY ASHIAH SCHARAGA

As Travis Elliott walked around the Chico Water Pollution Control Plant on a recent morning, he pointed to one of the facility’s three sedimentation tanks (where waste settles as part of the water-purifying process), which was empty and in need of repair. It’ll be out of service temporarily, “until we can catch up” on maintenance, Elliott, the plant’s lead operator, told the CN&R. “Normally, we’d repair that right away.”

Moments later, Erik Gustafson, city public works director of operations and maintenance, climbed a ladder to peer into the bed of a massive truck that can hold

24 tons of biosolids, which are taken to a compost facility. Instead of filling it every two days as was the norm a year ago, he said, the plant has been processing enough waste to fill it nearly every day.

Those are just two examples of changes the plant has seen since Nov. 8. As people from the Ridge and other



MORE WASTE

The Chico Water Pollution Control Plant has seen an influx of wastewater to the tune of 1 million additional gallons per day, according to data from the Public Works Department. City staff compared November through January with the same months the year prior and discovered average daily flows jumped from about 5.98 million gallons to 6.94 million gallons per day. That number has remained steady nearly six months later.

burn-scarred areas settled in Chico, the average daily flow passing through the facility—from sinks and toilets across the city—began to climb. City staff compared average daily flows from November through January with the same months the year prior and discovered they have increased dramatically: 16 percent, from about 5.98 million gallons to 6.94 million gallons per day.

That amount of growth is what the city expected to see “over several decades”—not overnight, Gustafson said.

While the treatment plant has enough capacity to handle the influx—the facility can process up to 12 million gallons each day—it is creating issues for the plant’s budget. It’s increasing the staff’s workload and the demand for supplies (such as the chemicals to treat the biosolids), electricity and maintenance.

A case in point: The plant’s small staff of 10—