

Gail Tozier stands before a dried-up pond on her property in Butte Valley.
PHOTO BY ASHIAH SCHARAGA

ronment. The canal—a system of ditches and wood-supported metal channels—was originally created in the late 1860s or early 1870s by the Miocene Gold-Mining Co.

Recently, PG&E started delivering 10,000 gallons per week and 2,500-gallon water tanks to seven users who requested additional supplies, Moreno said.

For Kurt Albrecht, owner of Chaffin Family Orchards, PG&E's deliveries have helped provide water for his cattle, but his family had to tear out 30 acres of dead and dying peach and apricot trees. They're keeping 20 acres of citrus trees alive with water from a family reservoir that filled to only one-third capacity this year.

"We're starting low on water and basically trying to spread the water thin enough to keep the trees alive to get through the summer," he said.

It's a financial hit that has required him to dip into savings to pay the bills and keep his employees on payroll. Chaffin Family Orchards has been farming at a loss for three seasons post-Camp Fire, Albrecht said.

The hardest part is the uncertainty, he added.

"At this point, we can't even make replant plans, 'cause I don't know if the water is gonna come back. [PG&E's] actions have been so questionable. ... I'm gonna wait till

there's water in the canal till we start planting," he said.

Meanwhile, even domestic water use is a concern. Some families are rationing water for everyday needs such as showering and toilet flushing; dirty clothes are hauled to laundromats in town.

Ed Cox, spokesman for the Miocene Canal Coalition (an advocacy group made up of water beneficiaries), is familiar with such conservation practices. He's spent \$30,000 adding storage facilities to his property and pumping his wells to fill ponds that are used by his cattle and for fire suppression, he said.

And as much as he's invested, he knows of neighbors who've spent more to secure water.

Everyone in the valley is hurting, he said, but the drought has made things particularly painful. In previous dry spells, the canal helped locals get by, Cox said. In his family's case, it fed a nearby creek that ran year-round and kept his ponds full. The creek has since dried up.

"It's a matter of survivability, not profitability," he said. "What do you do? Do you sit your family down and say: 'We have no water. Are we moving, are we going to try to sell our property and go ahead and move on?'"

'Beyond frustrated'

Stakeholder meetings after the Camp Fire, including explorations of solutions such as installing a pipe to siphon water from Lake

NEWSLINES CONTINUED ON PAGE 10



The Miocene Canal (shown in red) spans 25 miles, from Magalia to Oroville.
MAP BY TINA FLYNN

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