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Op-Ed: Is the Kelly Slater Wave Co. system obsolete already?

Written by Evan Quarnstrom
November 2, 2022

It's been seven years since Kelly Slater first unveiled his dream wave, captivating the minds of anyone who has ever touched a surfboard.

The central-California pool broke down the door for what was once thought possible by creating 10-second barrels over 100 miles from the ocean.

But the world of wave pool technology has grown lightyears since that eureka moment and, commercially speaking, Kelly Slater Wave Co.'s (KSWC) pool has fallen behind.

“Unfortunately, the KSWC was obsolete the day it was unveiled,” said Skip Taylor, a Partner of Surf Park Management. “Although the KSWC was a dream wave to ride, it was clearly not commercially viable for a public surf park setting.”

“What happens time after time is once people start to dig into the financial feasibility and see the limited capacity, the large footprint of the venue, the scale of civil construction, and the awkwardness of the pool shape to build around, KSWC quickly gets dismissed in most cases,” Taylor added.



The foil track creates a perfect wave for those patient enough and willing to spend enough to drop in.

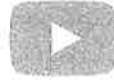
That doesn't mean Slater's pool has not been successful. Quite to the contrary, rumor has it the pool, which reportedly costs USD \$50,000-\$70,000 to rent per day, is booked out well into the future.

Yet developers across the globe have nearly unanimously avoided Slater's pool, opting to contract the services of competing technologies, such as Endless Surf, Wavegarden, PerfectSwell, and Surf Lakes, due to their more economically viable models.

Currently in Brazil, Wavegarden and PerfectSwell are engaged in a slugfest over who can make the world's 'best' pool.

KSM Realty and JHSF, the developers of Praia da Grama and Boa Vista Village, respectively, considered attaching Slater's pool to their extravagant housing communities, but both came to the same conclusion: Slater's pool looks really fun to surf, but it doesn't compare to the commercial potential of its competitors.

Sunshine Makarow gets the barrel of her life at Kelly Slater Surf Ranch



Oscar Segall, CEO of KSM Realty, told me that he spoke with Kelly, but it was determined the technology was not viable for their model.

“We were extremely impressed by [KSWC and PerfectSwell], but it was clear that PerfectSwell offered a more holistic approach to surfing, with waves for all levels of surfers, from beginners to pros,” said Thiago Alonso de Oliveira, CEO of JHSF.

I liken the position of Slater’s pool to the Blackberry cell phone circa 2010.

Blackberry was a pioneer in the cell phone space and even the preferred option of then US president Barack Obama. They had an industry-leading 43% of the market share in the US at their peak.

Then came the iPhone with its touchscreen technology.

Blackberry insisted on sticking with a keyboard. Their complacency spelled the beginning of the end. After an initial aversion to transition with the market trends and a far-too-late attempt to enter the smartphone market, the Blackberry cell phone finally sputtered to an inevitable death with its final model in 2018.

Much like Blackberry, KSWC pioneered a new technology – in this case a wave that could mimic the power of the ocean. And like Blackberry, KSWC is stubbornly hanging onto its original blueprint. As markets demand a smaller pool with a higher wave rate, KSWC is sticking to its guns.



Caroline Marks at the Surf Ranch in Lemoore during WSL competition. Photo by WSL/Cestari

And the results show.

Despite two attempts to reproduce the KSWC pool in Japan and Florida, neither project came to fruition.

KSWC is still sitting on purchased land in Austin, Texas, having acquired the NLand surf park back in 2019. There hasn't been a peep about that project gaining any traction.

The fact that they bought land to develop, but never developed, makes you wonder. Why?

Is KSWC satisfied with their single pool and the power that WSL possesses to use it on the Championship Tour?

Or are there internal and/or external factors that are preventing them from reproducing? KSWC/WSL did not respond immediately to requests for comment on the subject.

To be clear, this is not a hit piece on Slater's pool. I, in fact, admire the pool and, like every other surfer on the planet, dream of the opportunity to surf it. Decades from now, we might look back on the reveal of the wave in Lemoore as the most important surfing milestone of the century.

Rob Machado at Kelly's



Taylor applauds the pool as well.

"The entire industry owes a huge debt of gratitude to KSWC for bringing global awareness of surf parks," said Skip Taylor. "The "Kelly Slater" factor helped amplify the knowledge of modern surf parks to the mainstream and caught the attention of hundreds of developers that saw that a surf park could be a great amenity to a commercial, residential and/or hospitality resort development."

"They have done a great job to adapt their original test facility into an amazing exclusive experience for a select few with the pocketbook to afford that level of price tag," Taylor added.

But as in any industry that deals with rapidly advancing technology, the landscape is ever-changing and how companies adapt to every minuscule market detail determines their future.

One cannot help but question, if in the last seven years Slater's pool went from having no real competition to several real competitors who are producing waves at an ever-increasing rate around the world, where will we be in seven *more* years?

Based on how the current reality is playing out. Large, low-frequency pools, like Slater's, are not the best bet for the future.

But, a bet is a bet for a reason. There is uncertainty.

Perhaps the pendulum of wave pool trends will swing back towards KSWC's model. Or, maybe just like with their original pool reveal, they have big secrets yet to be revealed, ready to shock the world again.

I might have grey hair by the time we can definitely judge KSWC's decision-making, but with enough time, we'll see if their decisions pay off or spell their demise.

CVWD News

Posted on: November 9, 2022

CVWD takes action to reduce demand on Colorado River

Coachella Valley Water District (CVWD) Board of Directors took action to execute an agreement with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) to conserve Colorado River water by curtailing replenishment at its Thomas E. Levy Groundwater Replenishment Facility (Levy) for the remainder of 2022.



Understanding the need for action, the board also approved submittal of two proposals to USBR to participate in the Lower Colorado Conservation and Efficiency Program (LC Conservation Program) for up to three calendar years (CY 2023 through 2025) with combined conservation up to 35,000 acre-feet per year (af/yr) between the two voluntary, temporary, and compensated programs listed below. Under the agreement, conserved water would be reimbursed at \$400 per acre-foot (af).

Program 1: The Colorado River Water (CRW) Conservation Program seeks to enroll canal water users who can demonstrate a reduction in water use. The CRW Conservation Program was previously approved by CVWD's Board in June to be administered under the 500+ Plan, but due to external issues with funding partners delayed the program's implementation. Under the revised program, participants will be paid up to \$340/af if they are enrolled for the maximum duration of three years.

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Program 2: The Thomas E. Levy Replenishment Facility (TEL) Recharge Curtailment Program (TEL Curtailment Program) will conserve between 25,000 and 35,000 af/yr. The TEL Curtailment Program would be used to supplement the CRW Conservation Program. For example, if the CRW Conservation Program can achieve 10,000 af/yr of water reduction, the TEL Curtailment Program would provide 25,000 af/yr to achieve a total water reduction of 35,000 af/yr. It is contemplated that deliveries to other replenishment facilities could be curtailed as part of this effort to better manage the impacts of the reduced deliveries to only one facility.

“Although delivering water to the Levy Facility is important for CVWD’s groundwater management, temporarily suspending delivery to the facility will allow CVWD to achieve the goal of contributing materially to the River,” said CVWD General Manager Jim Barrett. “CVWD is fortunate to have a diversified water portfolio available to meet the needs of our local communities.”

Discussions are ongoing on what additional demand management actions within CVWD’s service area might be taken to help offset the reduction in recharge at the Levy facility. The water conservation regulations enacted by the State in June required all urban water suppliers to implement conservation actions under Level 2 of their Water Shortage Contingency Plan (WSCP), which are meant to reduce demand up to 20%. Based on recent groundwater production by CVWD and other urban water suppliers, successful implementation of Level 2 actions could offset suspending delivery to the Levy facility for the remainder of CY 2022.

“California water agencies are working in real time to build on previous water-saving actions and conserve significant volumes of water each year beginning in 2022 through 2025. We are eager to partner with the Bureau of Reclamation to enable reductions in water use. California calls on our basin partners to join us in finding ways to preserve the health of the Colorado River,” said CVWD Board Director and Chair of the California Colorado River Board, Peter Nelson.

CVWD is well positioned to do its part to conserve water as the conditions worsen on the Colorado River. CVWD has historically taken steps to increase water efficiency on its canal system and to store water for future dry years.

Major conservation actions taken by CVWD include:

- Investment in its irrigation delivery system to minimize system losses through the use of pipes and also metering 100% of properties served.
- Use of drip irrigation in about 60% of CVWD’s service area, which allows the average water application to be less than 3.8 acre feet per



DWR Announces Initial State Water Project Allocation of 5 percent, Outlines Actions for a Possible Fourth Dry Year

Published: Dec 01, 2022

SACRAMENTO, Calif. – Today, the Department of Water Resources (DWR) announced an initial State Water Project (SWP) allocation of 5 percent of requested supplies for 2023. The SWP provides water to 29 public water agencies that serve 27 million Californians.

As the state prepares for a fourth dry year and continued extreme drought conditions in California, DWR will also assess requests for additional water that may be necessary for health and safety including minimum domestic, sanitation, and fire suppression needs.

“This early in California’s traditional wet season, water allocations are typically low due to uncertainty in hydrologic forecasting. But the degree to which hotter and drier conditions are reducing runoff into rivers, streams and reservoirs means we have to be prepared for all possible outcomes,” said DWR Director Karla Nemeth.

Lake Oroville, the State Water Project’s largest reservoir, ended Water Year 2022 about 400,000 acre-feet higher than the previous year, which was the lowest storage level on record. However, Oroville remains just 55 percent of average for this time of year.

DWR is conserving existing storage in Lake Oroville in the event dry conditions continue. The initial 5 percent allocation would be met by flows from winter storms entering the Delta as well as stored water in San Luis Reservoir. If storage levels in Lake Oroville improve as the wet season progresses, DWR will consider increasing the allocation if warranted. DWR is also working closely with senior water rights holders on the Feather River downstream of Lake Oroville to monitor conditions and assess water supply availability should dry weather persist.

“We are in the dawn of a new era of State Water Project management as a changing climate disrupts the timing of California’s hydrology, and hotter and drier conditions absorb more water into the atmosphere and ground. We all need to adapt and redouble our efforts to conserve this precious resource,” said Nemeth.

California traditionally receives half its rain and snow by the end of January. Water managers will reassess conditions monthly throughout the winter and spring. Starting in February, the assessments will incorporate snowpack data and runoff forecasts. For the second year in a row, DWR is broadening the deployment of more sophisticated technologies, such as aerial snow surveys, that can collect snow measurements farther upslope of the Sierra Nevada. This will improve forecasts of spring runoff into reservoirs.

Water managers will be monitoring how the wet season develops and whether further actions may be necessary later in the winter. If dry conditions persist, DWR may also pursue submission of a Temporary Urgency Change Petition (TUCP) and re-installation of the West False River Emergency Drought Salinity Barrier in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

Each year, DWR provides the initial State Water Project allocation by December 1 based on available water storage, projected water supply, and water demands. Allocations are updated monthly as snowpack and runoff information is assessed, with a final allocation typically determined in May or June.

The lowest initial SWP allocation was zero percent on December 1, 2021, with limited water

designated only for any unmet human health the safety needs. Last year's final allocation was 5 percent plus unmet health and safety needs. Four of the 29 State Water Contractors ultimately requested and received additional health and safety water supply.

Resources

- [Latest on California's Drought Response](#)
- [Current Statewide Reservoir Conditions](#)
- [Save Our Water: Tips to Conserve Water During a Drought](#)

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2002 through 2021. The reliability of SWP deliveries has declined since 2007 when Judge Wanger overturned the Biological Opinion regarding Delta export pumping operations. This decision significantly impacted DWR's ability to convey SWP supplies across the Delta for export. Since the 2007 Wanger decision, SWP final allocations have averaged 45 percent annually. This period has also been marked by six critically dry years.

Table 6-5. Historical SWP Table A Allocations, CVWD and DWA (2002-2021)

Year	100% Table A Volume Max Contract (AFY) ^a	Water Year Type	SWP Initial Allocation (%)	SWP Final Allocation (%)
2002	61,200	Dry	20%	70%
2003	61,200	Above Normal	20%	90%
2004	71,100	Below Normal	35%	65%
2005	171,100	Above Normal	40%	90%
2006	171,100	Wet	55%	100%
2007	171,100	Dry	60%	60%
2008	171,100	Critically Dry	25%	35%
2009	171,100	Dry	15%	40%
2010	194,100	Below Normal	5%	50%
2011	194,100	Wet	25%	80%
2012	194,100	Above Normal	60%	65%
2013	194,100	Critically Dry	30%	35%
2014	194,100	Critically Dry	5%	5%
2015	194,100	Critically Dry	10%	20%
2016	194,100	Above Normal	10%	60%
2017	194,100	Above Normal	20%	85%
2018	194,100	Critically Dry	15%	35%
2019	194,100	Above Normal	10%	75%
2020	194,100	Below Normal	10%	20%
2021	194,100	Critically Dry	5%	5%
20-year Average	--	--	24%	54%
14-Year Average Since Wanger	--	--	20%	45%

^a Source: DWR 2018, Bulletin 132-18, Appendix B Table B-4

^b Source: DWR 2018, Bulletin 132-18, Appendix B Table B-5B

In 2022 it was 5% or 9,705 acre-feet-year
 or 3.2 Billion Gallons of water
 In 2023 it will be 5%
 In the Indio Subbasin Management Plan they are
 using 45% SWP allocation per year for the
 next 25 years or 87,345 acre-feet/year

A DIFFERENCE or 77,640 afy or 49 Billion Gallons/ye