

Dixon Resource Conservation District (District)  
Proposed Ditch Maintenance Fee Increase

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

The following are answers to the most frequently asked questions about the District’s proposed fee increase.

**Q: What does the Ditch Maintenance Fee pay for?**

A: The Ditch Maintenance Fee primarily pays for on the ground work. See detail below:

- excavation, weed spraying, right of way maintenance and debris removal (70%)
- staff time for planning and overseeing all activities related to ditch maintenance & ditch billing (12%)
- materials & services, including drainage & fees or cost-share according to agreements with other agencies, legal & engineering fees specific to ditch operations, maintenance or upgrades of the existing system (18%)

**Q: There is not a ditch on my property. Why do I pay this fee?**

A: If the District drains did not exist, many parts of the 30,000+ acre service area would experience prolonged flooding during most storm events, with impacts to public safety and infrastructure. Even properties that do not have a direct connection benefit as the District’s 70.5 miles of drains allow the area to drain more quickly. This is why when the drains were constructed during the 1950’s and 1960’s, landowners signed mutual agreements authorizing the projects and agreeing to pay an annual per acre assessment to carry out ditch maintenance.

**Q: Why does the District need to raise the fee now?**

A: Over the last five years, the District has allowed annual Ditch Operations Expenses to significantly exceed the Ditch Operations Revenues (see below). The District cannot sustain this into the future.

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	TOTAL
Annual Ditch Operations Revenues	\$159,059	\$155,407	\$156,870	\$156,336	\$159,447	\$787,119
Ditch Operations (Ditch) Expenses	\$169,790	\$168,388	\$152,690	\$213,596	\$233,916	\$938,380
Ditch Capital Improvements	\$0	\$0	\$21,814	\$6,467	\$47,834	\$76,114
<b>Ditch Net Balance with Ditch Capital Improvements</b>	<b>-\$10,731</b>	<b>-\$12,981</b>	<b>-\$17,634</b>	<b>-\$63,727</b>	<b>-\$122,303</b>	<b>-\$227,375</b>

**Q: When would the rate go into effect?**

A: If approved, we would expect the rate increase to go into effect beginning December 1, 2026.

**Q: How much would the increase be to the average landowner?**

A: The rate would increase from \$4/ac to \$6/ac in 2027 and then increase more gradually up to \$8/ac in 2029. Each rate increase must be justified by staff annually. The proposed rates establish the maximum rate that could be charged in any given year, without initiating another Proposition 218 process (Prop 218). This means that the rate may increase more slowly if all anticipated costs are not incurred. Under the proposed rates, for a 40-acre parcel, the cost would increase by \$80/yr in 2027 and up to \$160/yr in 2029 through 2031.

**Q: Why are there a protest and an election?**

A: The Ditch Maintenance fee is considered a “property-related” fee under Prop 218, which requires a two phased process. The first phase is a protest vote. If 50% + 1 protests (by parcel) are submitted to the agency, the Board is not allowed to call for an election. If a majority protest is not received in June, the Board authorizes a special election with mailed ballots. For the rate increase to take effect the majority of the returned ballots, weighted according to the proportional financial obligation, must vote in favor (“yes”) of the rate increase.

**Q: How much does a Prop 218 process like this cost?**

A: While it is hard to know the exact final costs now, it is estimated that the rate setting process will cost approximately \$60,000 in staff time, legal counsel, outside engineering, and mailing costs.

***Q: What happens if the proposed rate fails?***

A: If the proposed rate increase fails, the District Board would have to reevaluate the level of services provided on all projects, including ditch maintenance. The Board would have to evaluate what level of fees the landowners are willing to pay in order to decide what services can be provided. A new Prop 218 process would have to be initiated with a new rate study, hearing and election process.

***Q: If I disagree with the rate increase, what are my next steps?***

A: If you disagree with the proposed increase, you may choose to protest the rate increase on the enclosed form. The District recommends that you come to the Hearing to voice your opinions in person so that the concerns may be addressed and considered. If you still disagree with the proposed rate increase after the Hearing and the Board moves forward with an election, you may vote “no” on the ballot you receive.

***Q: If I agree with the rate increase, what are my next steps?***

A: If you agree with the proposed increase, ignore the attached protest form. The District recommends that you come to the Hearing to voice your opinions in person. If the Board chooses to move forward with an election after the Hearing, you may vote “yes” on the ballot you receive.

***Q: Why does the District need \$515,000 in Reserve Funds?***

A: The District’s reserves are twofold. A minimum balance of one hundred & sixty thousand dollars (\$160,000) is used to maintain the annual cash flow for the District. Three hundred & fifty-five thousand dollars (\$355,000) is specifically allocated for equipment & capital improvements such as replacing aging ditch infrastructure.

***Q: What is the capital improvements money being saved for?***

A: Within the rate study, the District has identified \$75,000 for equipment reserves, \$61,000 for four specific high priority capital improvement projects on the District’s facilities. Capital improvement reserves also include savings for future flood damage repair & emergency projects on District facilities as well as cost-share on regional projects.

***Q: What other services does the District provide for its landowners?***

A: The District assists landowners & tenants with resource concerns, whether it is habitat planting or understanding new regulations for groundwater supply and water quality. The District partners with other agencies, such as Solano RCD & USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), to help customers achieve their resource goals.

***Q: If the new rate is approved, what will my rate be in 2032 and beyond?***

A: \$8/ac unless a new rate setting process is initiated.

***Q: If the new rate is approved, will the District still pursue other options to help offset costs in the future?***

A: Yes, the District Board will continue to look at every avenue possible to keep the Ditch Maintenance fee as low as possible. The Board is hopeful that this rate increase, if approved, will last longer than the projected 5 years.

***Q: How does the District ensure that maintenance costs related to irrigation water conveyance and use in District drains are fairly allocated?***

A: Ditch members that utilize the District ditches to convey and re-capture irrigation water are required to obtain an encroachment permit which requires them to assume maintenance responsibilities for the portion of ditch that could be impacted by their operation.

***Q: What are examples of the higher level of service being expected now versus the past?***

A: Since the drains were installed in the 1950s, historically landowners and operators along the system have provided high levels of in-kind maintenance work that has helped keep maintenance fees low. Many landowners and operators continue to assist with weed control on right of ways & debris removal at culvert inlets etc. However, there are increasing situations where landowners/operators are expecting the District to assume these activities.