

# Huatulco's Water Supply Revisited: Is There Relief in Sight?

By Randy Jackson

In January 2023, I published an article in *The Eye* titled “Huatulco's Water System: In Survival Mode?” It had become evident that Huatulco's water supply and delivery infrastructure was already stretched to its limits, with frequent interruptions in service leaving residents without water for days. Since then, Huatulco's population has continued to grow, alongside ongoing hotel, condo, and resort developments. With these changes, I set out to re-evaluate Huatulco's current water situation. My goal has been to answer the following three questions: What is Huatulco's water supply situation today? Has FONATUR stepped away from its role in managing Huatulco's water supply? And are there any plans in place to expand Huatulco's potable water availability?

## What Is Huatulco's Water Supply Situation Today?

Two years ago, the eight FONATUR wells near the Copalita River supplied up to 15 million liters of potable water daily. At the time, available data indicated that 78% of this water went to residents, hotels, and commercial use, while 22% was lost through leaks or allocated to irrigation. Since then, no updated water supply or demand reports have been published. However, two notable indications of what the water supply issue might be for Huatulco are in the public domain.

The first is a study by the *Comisión Nacional del Agua* (National Commission on Water, CONAGUA) titled *Programa Hidrico, Regional 2021-2024, Región Hidrológico-Administrativa, Pacífico Sur*. In this 80-page report covering the coastal region of Oaxaca, Huatulco's water and sewage system was classified as having a “type 2 deficit.” This classification refers to situations in which, despite having sufficient natural water availability, the infrastructure or management practices are inadequate to meet the demand effectively.

Under the heading “Problems detected in the consultation evaluation process for the PHR 2021-2024,” the report identifies “issues such as misuse of domestic and business water resources and leaks in Huatulco's already obsolete distribution network.” While no additional explanation is provided, numerous sources addressing Mexico's water supply overall identify leakage as a critical problem, with rates averaging around 40% and ranging from 30% to 70%.

The second indication emerged in March 2023, with media reports covering a federal inspection of Huatulco's water system conducted by the Federal Secretariat of Infrastructure, Communications, and Transportation (SICT). This inspection pointed to the need for substantial upgrades to the system. However, no specific plans for these upgrades have been published since, apart from the construction of a 108,000-liter storage tank, which is currently underway.



## How Are Huatulco's Wells Doing?

Since there are no published statistics on Huatulco's current water supply, I revisited the well sites to speak with a well-site operator. The operator assured me that all eight wells were running normally. Operators record the flow rates of each well daily. This is a manual process; the data are recorded in a spiral-bound notebook. A random glance through the operator's notebook suggested that production rates were close to 15 million liters per day—the same number I observed two

years previously. However, this production rate is significantly higher than the reported water delivered to customers.

The information on water deliveries, obtained by a request filed under the transparency laws of the state of Oaxaca, shows that water deliveries to all types of users for the first nine months of 2024 came to 2,598,310 cubic meters, or 9,482,882 liters. (The last column has been added to show the breakdown of consumption by user.)

Water Deliveries	Cubic Meters	Liters per Day	% of Total
Commercial	459,716	1,677,795	18%
Hotels	1,018,695	3,717,865	39%
Public Services	57,676	210,496	2%
Residences	673,083	2,456,507	26%
Tourism	389,140	1,420,219	15%
<b>Total Jan - Sep 2024</b>	<b>2,598,310</b>	<b>9,482,882</b>	<b>100%</b>

The last reported water sales data I could locate was for 2017, which showed a volume of 11,238,861 liters per day; this year's sales are 84% of those in 2017, despite seven years of increasing population.

The well operator I spoke to suggested that many supply problems in the last two years were due to breaks in the pipes supplying water to Huatulco. Water supply varies considerably from day to day and seems to depend on the residential area. In Santa Cruz this past year, the supply was far more intermittent than in previous years. Anecdotal responses from a few residents in other sectors suggest a supply not much worse than previous years, but consistent days of good water pressure are rare.

During my visit to the well site, five water trucks were awaiting their turn to fill up. One truck driver told me that 50 potable water trucks served the greater Huatulco area. These private companies buy water from the system operator and resell it to areas and residences not connected to the Huatulco water system, or they are connected but have no supply from the pipes.



From the above, I conclude that although the well system seems to have maintained its production levels, Huatulco's outdated infrastructure severely constrains water delivery to residents. Without substantial infrastructure upgrades to address leaks and increase storage, the water system will continue to fall short, especially during peak tourist seasons.

### Has FONATUR Stepped Away from Managing Huatulco's Water?

The short answer is yes. The entire water and sewage system is now under the responsibility of FIDELO – *Fideicomiso para el Desarrollo Logístico del Estado de Oaxaca* (Trust for the Logistics Development of the State of Oaxaca). FIDELO is like a public corporation. It was created on February 15, 1997. Its stated main objective is to position Oaxaca as a competitive region for developing various productive sectors through the promotion and execution of logistics, social, commercial, and tourism projects.

Emilio Rivera Moreno is the current Director General of FIDELO. He oversees the Huatulco operations as well as other responsibilities within the organization.

### Are There Plans in Place to Expand the Availability of Potable Water in Huatulco?

The short answer is – not that I could find. Given the critical water shortages in Oaxaca City, Mexico City, and across Mexico, combined with limited funding for water infrastructure, it seems unlikely that Huatulco's water needs will be seen as a priority. The CONAGUA report referenced above lists 119 municipalities in Oaxaca as having a Type 1 deficit, meaning water availability is below current demand, leading to overexploitation. Fortunately, this is not Huatulco's current situation.

However, there is a glimmer of hope. Mexico's new president, Claudia Sheinbaum, has pledged as part of her 100 campaign proposals to guarantee access to clean water through a National Water Plan. This includes revising the existing Water Law and allocating \$110 million MXN (\$5.4 million USD) from the Social Infrastructure Contribution Fund (FAIS) to support water projects in Mexico's poorest municipalities.

The photo accompanying this article shows a mural painted on the outside wall of the sports complex in La Crucecita: *Cuidemos el Agua* – "Let's take care of the water."

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