

# Pro-state water forces regroup

## Company may buy allotment

By Tom Friesen  
Staff Writer

NIPOMO — The voters' rejection of state water Tuesday could lead to increasing privatization of the precious resource and create unchecked development on the Nipomo Mesa, according to local officials.

"We're pretty upset about it," said Nipomo Community Services District board President David Manriquez. "State water was our most efficient hedge against future development."

District directors will begin scrambling to find new water sources next week, but there are few available options.

The rejection of state water by a 24-vote margin is being blamed on a flier mailed to local voters that was "loaded with a lot of misinformation," according to NCS D General Manager Ryder Ray.

(See related story in this issue.)

The author of the flier, Charles Gulyash, said Wednesday that it contained the results of objective

and extensive research, and that hooking into the State Water Project would have simply been a bad business deal for Nipomo.

But NCS D officials believe the rejection has put the local district in a tight spot.

"They have restricted the availability of water. The only thing left is well water," Ray said.

The district now pumps 1,000 to 1,200 acre-feet a year, with most of the production from wells outside its boundaries, which means that NCS D has only a secondary claim to the currently overdrafted groundwater basin.

An acre-foot, or 326,000 gallons, is enough to serve two families of three for a year.

Ray said the potential supply from Lake Nacimiento will not reach farther south than the city of San Luis Obispo and that desalination is impractical.

"All you have to do is measure the distance from Nipomo to the ocean," he said.

The district board, which was hoping to import 1,500 to 2,000 acre-feet of state water, will have to raise water rates to pay for the search for productive new wells, and

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## NCS D: Fliers tipped balance in water vote

By Tom Friesen  
Staff Writer

NIPOMO — In the election post-mortem, local water officials are blaming the defeat of Measure C on voter apathy and a last-minute mailing of anti-state water fliers.

Voters within the boundaries of the Community Services District rejected the idea of importing state water by a margin of 349 to 325.

David Manriquez, president of the Community Services District board, called the circulation of the fliers "an 11th-hour plan full of outright lies and misinformation."

The four-page flier was distributed by the Citizens Planning Alliance, a non-profit organization with between 300 and 400 members throughout the county.

The alliance focuses on educating

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— Charles Gulyash

make this information available," he said. "I didn't think it was fair to Nipomo to buy into the system without knowing all the facts."

He said the fliers contained information that was "as factual as possible" and perhaps even conservative. He mailed out 839 of them on Saturday. They arrived in local mailboxes the same day or on Monday.

"It's the first time we ever heard of this group," Manriquez said. "We

# State water backers regroup

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may have to institute mandatory conservation measures, Ray said.

The district may also have to refuse any future annexations, he said.

Manriquez said the district already has a freeze on annexations, but the loss of state water means that "we will have to seriously look at (whether it will be able to supply water to) developments within the district now."

Some 500 housing units are now in the planning process, he said. "We might not be able to serve them."

That would leave a large water vacuum on the mesa which privately owned California Cities Water could fill if it takes a larger share of state water than the 500 acre-feet it is currently requesting from the county.

Kathy James, an aide to 4th District Supervisor Ruth Brackett, said, "California Cities is just elated" with the situation.

She said Cal Cities — the second-largest water purveyor on the mesa — may consider buying NCSD's share and then selling it back.

James attended an election-night meeting that included Manriquez, Cal Cities District Superintendent Patrick Scanlon and thirsty residents of the Summit Station area where water has been at a premium for the past two years and some wells have gone dry.

She reported that Scanlon said Cal Cities wouldn't fight with NCSD over providing water to Summit Station, but Manriquez remained noncommittal about annexing that area to the district.

She quoted Scanlon as saying, "Maybe we'll ask for 5,000 acre-feet instead of 500."

"Cal Cities thinks it would be a great opportunity. They're in it to make money and there will be plenty of customers," James said, adding that it might be an advantage to privatize the local water supply, thereby removing politics from the issue.

Scanlon told the Five Cities Times-Press-Recorder on Wednesday that he was "very surprised" by the Nipomo vote and that local wa-

ter officials are undoubtedly upset.

There are few other water options open to the district, he said. Reclamation, conservation or desalination would all be much more expensive.

But he also acknowledged that the vote opens up new possibilities for his company.

Several landowners approached Cal Cities about providing water to

the Los Berros/Summit Station area, he said. The talks Tuesday were "very preliminary" but "we're here if they want to proceed."

Asked whether Cal Cities could buy additional water and then sell it back to NCSD, Scanlon said, "Everything is up in the air now. If NCSD approaches us, that's a distinct possibility and something that

could happen."

Scanlon said Cal Cities' request is still 500 acre-feet, but could change if the company is approached by NCSD or other groups.

However, those contacts will not be made within the next few weeks because Cal Cities is scheduled to file a rate increase with the Public Utilities Commission

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sion to pay for state water, and the company would also have to revise its official request to the county.

Ray said Thursday that the election result could force the district into maintaining its present size. "If Cal Cities can pick up 5,000 acre-feet, they could serve everything outside our district."

"If anybody thinks Cal Cities will

slow down development they're mistaken," he said. "They're in the business to make money (by selling water). If they've got it, they'll sell it."

Manriquez said the scenario of NCS buying water from Cal Cities is "just a possibility," but it could become "something we'll have to deal with."