

County & region

Nipomo voters seek State Water referendum

Project opponents retaliate against vacillating board

By Jerry Bunin
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Nipomo voters refuse to lose the election they won in November when they defeated the State Water Project.

They plan to start a referendum campaign Wednesday if the Nipomo Community Services District gives final approval to overturning the election.

The district board of directors originally said the Nov. 5 election was binding, but then tentatively decided

it wasn't after voters rejected State Water 349 to 325.

"The referendum asks the district to keep the election binding," said State Water opponent Charles Gulyash, "or to call a special election to let the voters decide" if it was binding.

David Manriquez, chairman of the district, said Monday he wasn't surprised a referendum would be presented at Wednesday's board meeting.

"I know enough people are upset about what the board wants to do Wednesday," he said. The board already delayed final approval once to let things cool off.

If the referendum passes and State Water is rejected, Manriquez said, Nipomo will still need water to honor promises it has already made to serve

district property owners.

"The issue is State Water. It's not reliable and it could be expensive," said Gulyash, who lives in Nipomo but not in the district. "State water will affect all of Nipomo."

District voters didn't want State Water, he said. "Their wishes are being ignored. The referendum will prevent that."

Referendum supporters will have 30 days to gather 234 valid signatures — equal to 10 percent of the registered voters in the district.

Don Smith, an opponent of State Water, said the referendum is a more effective method of defending the election than an initiative, which allows the public to ask voters to approve a new law.

"If the district votes Wednesday to

override the election," Gulyash said, "we'll probably start getting signatures right at the meeting if the people are there and are willing."

He is also meeting today with attorneys who helped draft the referendum and examine other legal options.

CSD attorney Arthur Shaw told the directors two weeks ago that state law allowed them to declare the election wasn't binding. The ordinance declaring the election non-binding claims that the light voter turnout and a political flier mailed late in the campaign justified bucking the vote.

Nipomo board members said that a 29 percent voter turnout was too small to reflect actual public opinion and that the flier contained inaccurate information about State Water.