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# Engineer: Nipomo has plenty of water

By Angela Hastings  
Times Staff Writer

NIPOMO — Nipomo residents concerned about water availability in their developing community heard Wednesday that the Nipomo Mesa in fact has ideal groundwater conditions for development to occur.

The theory, presented by engineer Donald Asquith, disputes San Luis Obispo County's general stance that groundwater availability decreases as development increases. Asquith is one of the authors of the environmental impact report for the proposed South County Area Plan, which will serve as a guide for development in Nipomo for the next 20 years.

The features that make the Nipomo Mesa — the portion of Nipomo west of Highway 101 — a

good site for development include the sandy soil and depressions between the Mesa's sand dunes, which together cause the soil to soak up water like a sponge, Asquith said. Therefore, the water does not flow off to the ocean, but enters the ground water basin where it can be used again.

Nipomo's east side and the Santa Maria Valley, on the other hand, have more clay in their soils, so rainfall and recharge from residents flow on the ground surface to the ocean.

Another factor in favor of development on the Mesa is that with slightly less vegetation and crops, which consume a large amount of water, more water will be available to recharge the groundwater basin.

"On the Mesa now, the only thing that takes water out of the

system is vegetation," Asquith said. Even drought-tolerant vegetation uses large amounts of water; it simply uses it in the winter when it is available.

However, the development must be balanced with open space areas containing natural depressions where water can seep back into the ground, Asquith said.

Too much concrete and pavement also would cause water to drain in streams rather than soak into the ground. San Luis Obispo, Arroyo Grande and Morro Bay replace little water into groundwater systems in part for that reason, Asquith said.

Because of the Mesa's ability to recharge the groundwater basin, an abundance of water is available below the Mesa that

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## Engineer likes Nipomo's water situation

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can be used to support a relatively dense population.

Asquith called into question some Nipomo residents' and county officials' concern that Nipomo may be in an overdraft situation, as a number of drying wells here seem to indicate. Overdraft means that the community withdraws more water than it puts back into the system, depleting the groundwater or nearby streams.

The water levels below the Mesa are higher than the water levels below Arroyo Grande and Santa Maria, which are part of

the same groundwater basin, so several hundred acre-feet of water per year flow downhill from the basin below the Mesa in southern and northern directions, according to a 1979 state Department of Water Resources report. Therefore, the Mesa is putting more water into the basin than it is withdrawing.

"Since you're giving away 82 percent of your water, you can't possibly be in overdraft," Asquith said. "You may be using substantially less than your share."

Although water levels below most of the Mesa are high, there

are some dry pockets, which account for the drying wells, according to Nipomo Community Services District Manager Ryder Ray.

Residents here often have voiced anger that the Mesa supplies so much water to Santa Maria without any compensation. Participation in the state water project would limit water loss to Santa Maria, because any acre-foot of state water that the Nipomo CSD purchases, uses and returns the groundwater system here can be pumped legally only by the CSD, Asquith said.