Supervisors at crossroads for county's c

By Ann Fairbanks
Telegram-Tribune

After postponing a decision for more than a decade, the county Board of Supervisors is rapidly approaching D-Day.

Will the county participate in the State Water Project?

A decision on that controversial question could be reached as early as Wednesday, when the supervisors will consider the latest environmental study of the State Water Project.

A special public hearing is scheduled for 9 a.m. at Embassy Suites in San Luis Obispo.

At that meeting — or possibly a follow-up one April 15 — the supervisors are expected to decide if they want to proceed with the State Water Project.

The supervisors will also consider the proposed contracts that will be sent to the county's communities.

Board Chairman Bud Laurent said he expects quite a bit of discussion of the proposed contract language requiring communities to use state water to offset their pumping of ground water.

Also to be discussed by the board is what to do with the surplus water if the county's communities — whose signed contracts are due by May 1 — request less than the county's share of 25,000 acre-feet a year.

The county's taxpayers have been paying since 1964 to protect their right to that state water.

In order to deliver that water to San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara counties, the coastal branch of the State Water Project must be built.

A decision on whether to build that coastal branch has been postponed nine times during the last decade by officials in both counties. Early this year, though, Santa Barbara County officially requested the state to proceed with the project.

San Luis Obispo County must notify the state of its interest by June 3. The state will then begin its final design of the 87-mile pipeline that will traverse San Luis Obispo County — whether or not San Luis Obispo County participates — into Santa Barbara County.

An environmental study of the proposed coastal branch was completed last May. Another study — on nine local distribution pipelines, a water treatment plant, and two hydroelectric plants — was released last week.

Here's a description of those proposed facilities as contained in the two-volume study by the Santa Barbara consulting firm of Ogden Environmental and Energy Services:

Distribution pipelines

About 43 miles of local distribution pipelines would be built to deliver

The pipeline route

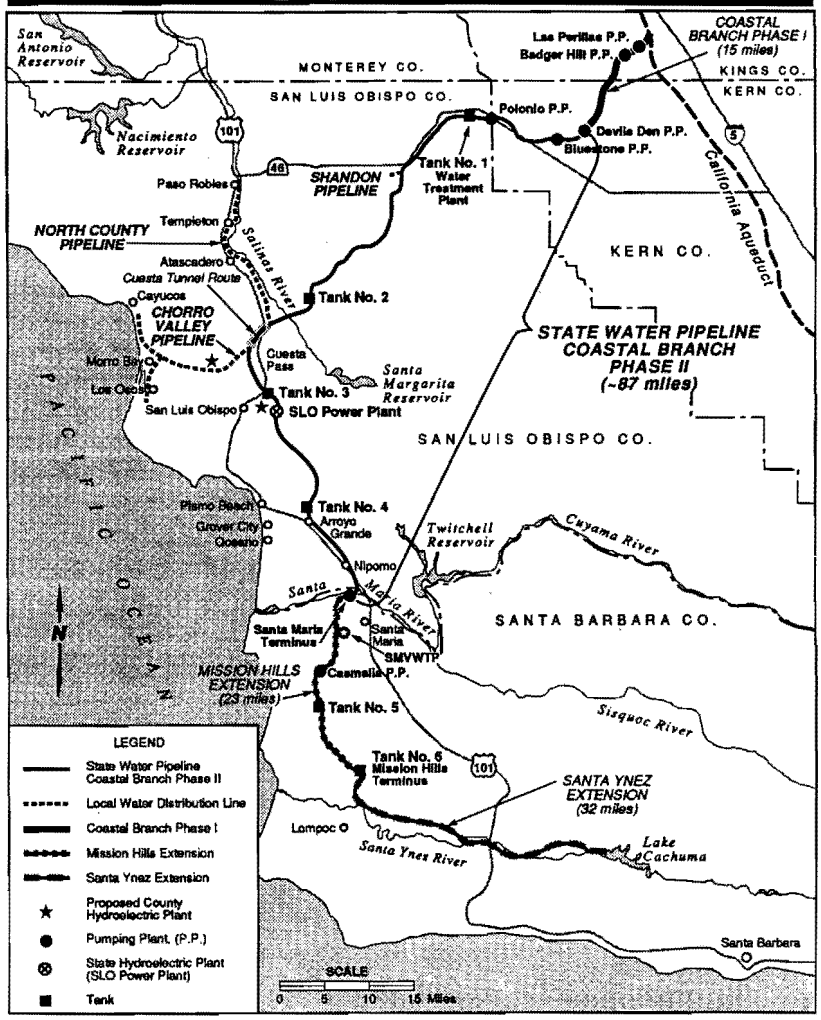

FIGURE 2.2-1

ERCE Overview of State and Local Pipeline Routes, Tank Sites, and Pumping Plant Sites for SLO and Santa Barbara Counties

individual communities.

Measuring in diameter from 8- to 18-inches, most of the pipeline segments would be buried at a depth of about 4 feet. However, portions of the pipeline would be visible at some stream crossings where environmental concerns would require the pipelines be placed above-ground.

The two major pipelines would be:

■ **North County**

This spur line would be the longest, extending from Santa Margarita some 17 miles northward to the intersection of Highways 46 and 101 south of Paso Robles.

The pipeline, ranging in diameter from 12- to 18-inches, would follow the Southern Pacific Railroad alignment next to El Camino Real. It would connect with the water distribution systems of Atascadero, Templeton and Paso Robles.

■ **Chorro Valley**

This 13-mile segment would originate near the south portal of the Cuesta Grade tunnel and follow the existing Santa Margarita Lake pipeline to the Whale Rock Reservoir pipeline at the California Men's Colony.

Whale Rock pipeline to Morro Bay and terminate at Elena Street.

Linking Morro Bay to Cayucos would be a 4-mile extension to Ocean Avenue in Cayucos. Another 2.5-mile segment would take state water from Morro Bay to Los Osos along South Bay Boulevard to Santa Ysabel Avenue.

According to the study, this segment "lies adjacent to some of the most valuable wildlife habitat in the entire study area."

One alternative discussed in the study is for Morro Bay's, Los Osos' and Cayucos' share of state water to be delivered to the communities that currently receive water from the Whale Rock reservoir: San Luis Obispo, Cal Poly and CMC.

In exchange, the three coastal communities would receive an equal amount of water from Whale Rock.

"The main advantage of this alternative is that it simplifies the pipeline system and reduces the cost to deliver water to each of the above communities," the consultants wrote.

The minor pipelines would be:

■ **Shandon**

An 8-inch pipeline would extend

coastal branch at San Juan Ro Toby Way to the local distr main at Highway 41.

■ **San Luis Obispo (nor south)**

A 1-mile-long pipeline would northward along an existing gas pipeline corridor to the reservoir north of Cuesta small hydroelectric plant woul be built near the reservoir.

The southbound pipeline extend about ¾-mile from the lectric plant to Orcutt Road.

■ **SLO Country Club**

A 1.25-mile-long pipeline extend from the coastal branc east side of Orcutt Road Ranchos Road and the S California Water Co. system.

■ **Lopez**

A half-mile pipeline would from the coastal branch's cro Lopez Drive to an existing ma the entrance to the Lopez treatment plant. From the water would be combined wit ed Lopez Lake water and flow existing pipeline to South communities.

■ **Nipomo (north and sout**

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The southbound pipeline originate at the coastal b crossing of Orchard Road and about 1.25 miles to an existing Orchard Road near Southland.

Water treatment pla

The largest and potentiall visible facility would be the p water treatment plant with a for 82 million gallons per day.

The plant would treat all t water destined for San Luis and Santa Barbara counties, combined entitlement is 82,7 feet a year.

It would be constructed on of hilly agricultural land at Pass. The land is situated nea of a ridge in the foothills Temblor Range about 10 mile east of Shandon and 3 miles the San Andreas fault.

The plant would be jointly o by San Luis Obispo and Santa ra counties.

Hydroelectric plants

Two hydroelectric plants w built to generate electricit turbine engines operated by t of the flowing water.

One would be located abo feet southwest of Chorro R near CMC, and the other w built next to the city's reserv Cuesta Park.

Each 1,200 square-foot plan occupy about 10,000 square and. The one-story building

water to offset their pumping of ground water.

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The line would then parallel the Whale Rock pipeline to Morro Bay and terminate at Elena Street.

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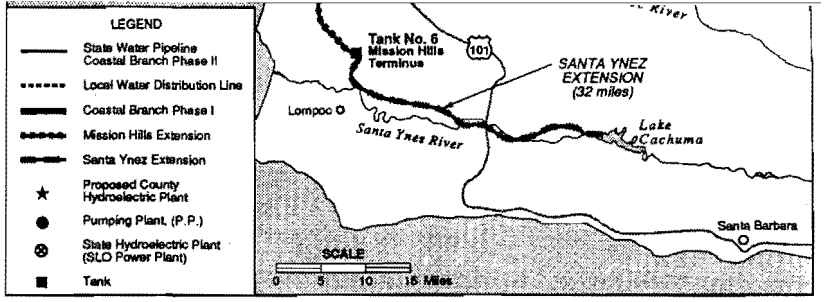

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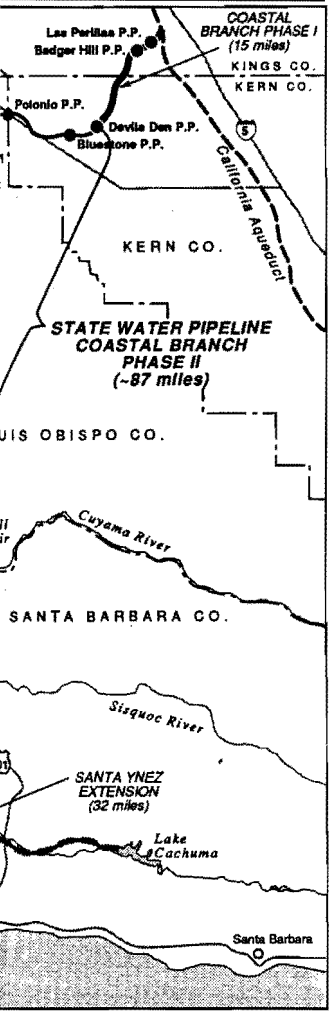

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coastal branch at San Juan Road and Toby Way to the local distribution main at Highway 41.

■ **San Luis Obispo (north and south)**

A 1-mile-long pipeline would extend northward along an existing oil and gas pipeline corridor to the city's reservoir north of Cuesta Park. A small hydroelectric plant would likely be built near the reservoir.

The southbound pipeline would extend about ¾-mile from the hydroelectric plant to Orcutt Road.

■ **SLO Country Club**

A 1.25-mile-long pipeline would extend from the coastal branch at the east side of Orcutt Road to Los Ranchos Road and the Southern California Water Co. system.

■ **Lopez**

A half-mile pipeline would extend from the coastal branch's crossing of Lopez Drive to an existing manhole at the entrance to the Lopez water treatment plant. From there, the water would be combined with treated Lopez Lake water and flow via the existing pipeline to South County communities.

■ **Nipomo (north and south)**

The northbound pipeline would connect the coastal branch at Tefft or Dana streets to the Nipomo Community Services District's system.

The southbound pipeline would originate at the coastal branch's crossing of Orchard Road and extend about 1.25 miles to an existing main in Orchard Road near Southland.

Water treatment plant

The largest and potentially most visible facility would be the proposed water treatment plant with a capacity for 82 million gallons per day.

The plant would treat all the state water destined for San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara counties, whose combined entitlement is 82,700 acre-feet a year.

It would be constructed on 60-acres of hilly agricultural land at Polonio Pass. The land is situated near the top of a ridge in the foothills of the Temblor Range about 10 miles northeast of Shandon and 3 miles east of the San Andreas fault.

The plant would be jointly operated by San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara counties.

Hydroelectric plants

Two hydroelectric plants would be built to generate electricity from turbine engines operated by the force of the flowing water.

One would be located about 1,000 feet southwest of Chorro Reservoir near CMC, and the other would be built next to the city's reservoir near

Water-tight towns likely to grow with state water

The latest study on the State Water Project lists deteriorating air quality and an increased rate of growth as the project's "unavoidable significant environmental impacts."

The study explores the environmental effects of building a water treatment plant, two hydroelectric plants and 43 miles of local pipelines to distribute state water to the county's communities from the proposed coastal branch of the California Aqueduct.

During construction of the local facilities, consultants wrote in the study, dust and emissions from equipment would pollute the air.

This "significant impact" is labeled "short-term," because it would affect air quality only during construction.

A long-term, significant effect of importing state water, the consultants wrote, would be "an increased rate of population growth in areas now subject to water resource constraints."

Those areas are Templeton, Avila Beach, Pismo Beach, Morro Bay, Cayucos, San Luis Obispo, Los Osos, and San Luis Obispo Country Club Estates.

To minimize growth, the consultants recommend that each community adopt an ordinance or a management plan specifying that state water would be used first to offset its share of any ground water basin overdraft.

This recommendation — and the proposed language in the contracts requiring this offset — will likely generate much discussion at Wednesday's public hearing, according to board Chairman Bud Laurent.

Besides a water management plan, other "mitigation measures" recommended in the study include:

■ School districts should place bond measures on the ballot to build new schools.

■ Developer fees should be adopted to finance road improvements. Such fees are currently collected in Nipomo, Templeton and Avila Beach.

■ The county should investigate ways of financing the future widening of Highway 101 from four to six lanes between the South County and San Luis Obispo.

■ The county should establish a regional park district to acquire land for parks and open space greenbelts around urban communities receiving state water.

■ Paso Robles should not approve any development unless all required public services are available.

Even if all the recommended measures are adopted, the consultants wrote, "it is still likely that importation of water to the communities where growth has been constrained by a lack of sufficient water resources would result in an increased rate of growth."

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— report on SWP

All other potential impacts are labeled "non-significant" and include:

■ Visual — A water treatment plant at Polonio Pass "would create a highly visible public utility facility in a remote rural area visible from Highway 46."

■ Health — The "potentially significant health impacts" from byproducts formed when the water is disinfected can be offset by meeting all drinking water standards.

■ Traffic — During pipeline construction, "significant vehicle delays" would be anticipated at Highway 41 and the Southern Pacific Railroad crossing in Atascadero, and at South Bay Boulevard in Los Osos.

"Both road segments are heavily traveled commute routes with limited alternative roadways to destinations," the consultants wrote.

■ Biological resources — About 300 oak trees would be destroyed or damaged during construction. The study suggests four trees be planted for every destroyed tree.

Animals that could be affected include the red-legged frog, southwestern pond turtle, burrowing owl, American badger, San Joaquin kit fox, Tulare grasshopper mouse and McKittrick pocket mouse.

— Ann Fairbanks