

Nipomo moves to restrict new water allocation

By Todd Cralley/Staff Writer

Customers of the Nipomo Community Services District have been given 40 days to respond to a new water allocation program that is set for final adoption June 13. If approved, the program will become effective Oct. 1.

“We are trying to guard the water resources we have,” said Bruce Buel, NCSD general manager. “We're shepherding what we believe we have available.”

The allocation system, which had its first reading by the board Wednesday, would place a limit on the amount of residential development allowed each year.

Under the program, the district would reserve a total of 34.3 acre-feet per year for new residential projects, including landscape uses, on a first-come, first-served basis.

An acre-foot is equal to about 326,000 gallons, or enough to meet the average yearly water needs of two families of three in most urban settings.

Of the 34.3-acre-foot total, 21.86 acre-feet would be allocated for single-family homes and duplexes, 6.86 acre-feet for multifamily dwellings and 3.36 acre-feet for secondary units and agency-maintained landscaping projects.

Any unused allotments among those categories could be reallocated at the end of the second quarter and middle of the fourth quarter of each year.

The district would also reserve 2.22 acre-feet per year for lower-income housing. Unused allocations for lower-income housing could only be reallocated during the fourth quarter.

Allocations would be based on 0.33 acre-feet per multifamily dwelling unit and 0.24 acre-feet per unit for duplexes and secondary dwellings per year.

For single-family homes, allocations would be 0.29 acre-feet for parcels 4,500 square feet or less, 0.39 acre-feet for parcels of 4,500 to 10,000 square feet and 0.69 acre-feet for parcels more than 10,000 feet.

However, total allocations would be reduced by a greater amount per unit to allow for commercial demand resulting from residential developments.

The new ordinance is the result of the agency's failed attempts to bring in supplemental water to recharge the underground aquifer.

“We found that we needed to limit the amount of water committed to new growth,” Buel said.

“We're taking more out of the basin than is being recharged. We're clearly in a state of overdraft.”

That's a danger to the entire Nipomo Mesa Management Area, said NCSD Director Jim Harrison, because if too much water is pumped out of the aquifer, the results could be disastrous.

“The severity of the water problem is well-known on the Mesa,” Harrison said.

“We do not want to reach the point where we're facing sea water intrusion. Nobody wants that.

“All of us agree that we need to do something about the water in the (groundwater basin). We only have so much water to go around.”

NCSD's initial attempt to alleviate the water shortage - building a pipeline from Santa Maria to Nipomo - proved unfeasible due to skyrocketing construction costs, according to Buel.

“The initial cost of the pipeline was \$6 million, but it jumped to \$24 million,” he said. “That's just too costly.”

Still, the agency is committed to finding a reasonable solution to the area's dwindling water supply.

“We're looking at six or seven different solutions to bringing in supplemental water,” said Harrison.

“This ordinance is a safeguard against depleting the water we have available for future development because we are at least three years away from bringing in supplemental water.

“It is more responsible to restrict the amount of water allocated for future development now than it is to say no more moratoriums on development.”

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