

New water report has good news for Nipomo

By Todd Cralley/STAFF WRITER

Nipomo's groundwater is free from sea water incursion, according to a comprehensive study commissioned by the Nipomo Community Services District this spring.

The amount of fresh water in Nipomo's underground water basin is uncertain, and if it drops too far, salt water would flow underground from the ocean, possibly fouling wells.

In the new study, which was presented at Wednesday's NCSD meeting, Science Applications International Corp., a Carpinteria-based water resources engineering firm, tested three wells for water quality.

Along the western edge of the Nipomo Mesa Management Area, the freshwater wells are known as the "sentinel wells." They are 200, 400 and 700 feet deep, according to the report, and are just west of the Conoco-Phillips refinery and just inland from the ocean.

"Testing of the sentinel wells indicates no intrusion of sea water," said Brad Newton of SAIC. "This is good news. There has been no change over a 30-year period."

Newton also indicated that the wells, last tested in 1995, seem healthy.

"The hydrology of these wells shows significant flow to the ocean - and that's during a dry year - which indicates that there is enough flow to keep salt water from intruding into the groundwater. We can summarize that there is no evidence of sea water intrusion into the groundwater aquifer under the Nipomo mesa," he said.

Ideally, Newton said, the sentinel wells should be tested annually to guard against salt water intrusion.

The second phase of the report was to determine the amount of groundwater that is under the Nipomo Mesa Management Area based on groundwater elevation data collected in 2000, 2006 and 2007.

In all, 63 wells throughout the mesa area were tested.

This data will be used to create a monitoring program where wells are measured and tested regularly to determine the amount of water in underground storage.

The results of this initial analysis indicate that the volume of groundwater in storage above sea level for the current year is 90,000 acre feet, down from the measured volume of 102,000 acre feet in 2006, and 100,000 acre feet in 2000.

On average, the groundwater elevations have dropped seven feet from April 2006 to April 2007 when comparing water elevations taken at the same wells.

During the 2007 water year, rainfall was approximately 40 percent of normal in San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara counties.

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