



Thur

Posted on Thu, Dec. 13, 2007

Nipomo will go forward with desal pl and pipeline from Santa Maria

Nick Wilson

The Nipomo services district will pursue building a desalir desalination plant that could cost nearly \$100 million or a new wa pipeline from Santa Maria that would cost an estimated estimate million to \$18 million. million.

The district's board voted Wednesday to move ahead with the tw Nipomo now depends entirely on its groundwater. Without a new all of the district's groundwater above sea level could be used up 12 years, according to Celeste Whitlow, a district spokeswoman. spokeswoman.

"Nipomo is running out of water and at an alarming rate," she sai statement.

The board deferred any decision decision on pursuing state wate The vote was preliminary and does not commit the district district option.

Desalination and the Santa Maria pipeline would involve a long p process and face a range of permit applications. Water customer pay higher rates to pay for either project.

Desalination proposal

Noting that a desalination plant has been discussed for 10 years Nipomo, board President Mike Winn said it's time to move forwar specific planning.

"Desal is the only option that provides a long-term, sustainable, sustainable, drought-proof water supply," Winn said. "Everything Everything else depends on politics, weather or both."

A desalination plant, which would provide a minimum of 6,300 ac year, is at least eight years away from completion, the district sai An acre-foot of water is enough to cover an acre of land a foot de serves about two single-family homes for a year.

Desalination was unanimously unanimously approved by the five five-member board. Directors consider consider it as a long-term source.

In its report, consultant Boyle Engineering Corp. suggested sugg three sites for the desalination desalination plant—the South Sar Obispo County Sanitation District facility, a property adjacent adj; the ConocoPhillips refinery refinery along Highway 1 and a 35-ac undeveloped parcel near Highway 1 and Oso Flaco Lake Road.

Its construction would depend on factors such as obtaining the permits and approval by ratepayers. The cost for each customer would be an additional \$127 to \$154 per month. For now about \$40 per month per customer.

Strategies on how to proceed with a desalination plant are reopening talks with Santa Maria about the pipeline proposal will be discussed at district board meetings in January, January, General Manager Bruce Buel said.

Linking to Santa Maria

The pipeline project, which directors approved by a 4-1 vote, would deliver an estimated 3,000 acre-feet of water per year and could take about three to four years to finish. Building it would require a new agreement with Santa Maria. The cost per customer would be an estimated \$58 to \$71 a month.

Director Jim Harrison voted against reopening talks, saying the district wastes too much time and money on studies that lead to no fruit from projects.

The capital cost of the Santa Maria alternative was estimated at about \$26 million in 2006. But Buel said he believes that amount could be reduced to \$15 million to \$18 million with changes to the initial proposal.

Winn said the district has already negotiated to use a separate pipeline that would be able to channel some water from Santa Maria.

Negotiations with Santa Maria started early this decade, and an agreement with the city to pay for water was developed in 2004. But a 2006 estimate to build the pipeline led Nipomo to consider other options.

Initially, the district had estimated the pipeline construction to cost \$6 million in 2004, but some unlikely assumptions were made in that study about the proposed system for water delivery, said Director Ed Eby.

State water plan averted

The board delayed making any decision Wednesday on a third option to buy into state water, which would require approval from several agencies — including the county, the state Department of Water Resources and Central Coast Water Authority.

Gaining approval could prove difficult and state water would not be a reliable source, Winn said.

Eby said he didn't want to rule out that option without more research because it's potentially the cheapest source of water.

"We'd have a lot of explaining to do if we walk away," Nipomo resident Bill Petrick echoed Harrison's sentiment Wednesday, noting the years of discussion and some drastic savings in estimated costs associated with the water options.

“What the NCSD staff is doing doing is throwing darts blindfolded blindfolded,” Petrick said. “You buy a single dart, throw it, and ho hits the target. If it doesn’t hit the target, then try again.”
Reach Nick Wilson at 781-7922.

© 2007 San Luis Obispo Tribune and wire service sources. All Rights Reserved.
<http://www.sanluisobispo.com>
