

Water still top resource issue

By April Charlton/Senior Staff Writer

San Luis Obispo County's 2008 Annual Resource Summary Report will focus on the No. 1 issue that has surfaced in reports for the last four years: water.

On Tuesday, planning staff members presented the 2007 summary report to the Board of Supervisors and said they are working to improve the report that will focus heavily on water in the future.

The report compiles information on the county's resources, and looks at the availability and demand in a given year for water supply, water systems, sewage collection and treatment systems, roads, schools and air quality.

Information contained in the report allows the supervisors to declare and certify levels of severity for certain resources, such as water in the Nipomo Mesa Conservation Area.

Last year, the supervisors certified a Level 3 severity for the Nipomo Mesa Conservation Area, which means supply is exceeding demand and a supplemental water source is needed.

The severity level applies only to the Mesa Conservation Area and not the entire Santa Maria Valley Groundwater Basin; the area comprises less than 30 percent of the basin, according to county staff.

By certifying a Level 3 severity in an area, the supervisors can authorize moratoriums on all new construction there. However, they have said in the past they don't want to place a moratorium on Nipomo if it can be avoided.

The 2007 Resource Summary Report indicates Nipomo's water supply could be in serious jeopardy within the next two years if supplemental water isn't secured or less water is taken out of the groundwater basin.

"We're working hard to make sure that doesn't happen," Mike Winn, Nipomo Community Services District president, told the supervisors.

Winn also requested that the county take the word "overdraft" out the report and replace it with "consumption exceeds recharge" when referring to the Mesa Conservation Area.

"Frankly, it's just better to say it another way," Winn said. "Overdraft is such a complex term; we just want you to use a common sense term. What we're saying is that we're using more water each year than falls on us."

The Community Services District is attempting to work out a deal with the city of Santa Maria to buy some of its excess State Water for Nipomo. The district is also considering the possibility of building a desalination plant to provide water.

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