

TOP FEATURED NEWS

Demand for water exceeds supply: County recommends continuing to cap the number of building permits

By April Charlton/Senior Staff Writer

For the third consecutive year, water in the Nipomo Mesa Water Conservation Area will remain at a level where demand is exceeding supply.

On Tuesday, the San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors accepted the 2008 Annual Resource Summary Report, which compiles information on the county's resources.

The report is intended to provide the supervisors and the Planning Commission with a clear picture of the county's resources, such as water.

In the newest report, planning staff recommended the supervisors maintain a "Level 3 severity" — the highest possible — for water on the Nipomo Mesa. Level 3 means demand is already exceeding supply.

Staff also recommended the supervisors continue to cap the number of annual residential building permits at 1.8 percent for the Nipomo area because of water constraints there.

Since certifying the Level 3 severity in 2007, water-conservation measures such as low-flow plumbing for all new construction and planning-area standards have been adopted for Nipomo.

Additionally, tiered water rates have been approved by some of Nipomo's water purveyors on the Mesa, which Jerry Bunin, Central Coast Homebuilders Association government affairs director, said should be enacted countywide.

"It should have already been done," Bunin said about implementing tiered water rates in all unincorporated areas of the county. "You shouldn't wait until you get to Levels 2 and 3 (severity).

“You have to go after the source of the problem, and that’s existing residents,” he added. “New construction won’t fix the problem.”

County senior planner James Caruso said the county has no authority to require independent water purveyors to adopt tiered rates, but can ask key stakeholders to come to the table to talk.

“It takes a lot of hard work and collaboration,” Caruso said, adding tiered rates in Nipomo “didn’t come overnight.”

Under a tiered system, the more water that a customer uses, the more he or she pays for the resource.

Fourth District county Supervisor Katcho Achadjian said one of the only ways to get people to conserve water in water-strapped areas like Nipomo is to make them pay a premium for high usage.

“Until it hits them in the pocket, they will use the water,” Achadjian said.

The county plans to expand discussions with water purveyors on the Nipomo Mesa to include rate structures, supplemental water supplies and expansion of small community water systems, Caruso said.

acharlton@theadobepress.com