

Hearing set to certify pipeline EIR

By Mike Hodgson/Associate Editor

The final environmental impact report for the pipeline to carry supplemental water from Santa Maria to Nipomo is expected to be certified at a public hearing April 22.

Nipomo Community Services District directors plan to vote on certifying the EIR during the regular meeting scheduled to start at 9 a.m. in the district board room, 148 S. Wilson St.

“The board is pleased with the document ... ,” said NCS D General Manager Bruce Buel, noting the board members directed the staff to prepare the findings that most impacts have been mitigated and the benefits outweigh the impacts of those that can’t be mitigated.

Two members of the public — Bill Petrick and John Snyder — criticized portions of the report, as well as the project itself, and recommended additional steps the district should take with regard to the EIR and the pipeline plan.

Buel said the EIR went beyond the level of scrutiny provided by a mitigated negative declaration often used by government agencies for projects that benefit the public.

“Because the district prepared a final EIR, it (provides) even more disclosure (of the impacts) than a mitigated negative declaration,” he said.

Significant unavoidable impacts that can’t be mitigated to a level of insignificance included the potential for changing land use and inducing additional development by removing the constraints imposed by a lack of adequate water supplies.

However, the EIR notes the supplemental water is only designed to reduce an imbalance in groundwater levels and to serve new development envisioned by the current South County Area Plan within the NCS D boundaries and its sphere of influence.

Benefits that outweigh the unavoidable impacts include reducing the potential for seawater intrusion in the groundwater basin, complying with the settlement stipulation and judgment in the 2005 groundwater litigation that requires management of the Nipomo Mesa Groundwater Management Area.

Other overriding benefits include stabilizing groundwater levels by reducing pumping, augmenting water supplies through phased delivery of water and augmenting water available to the Woodlands and other water purveyors.

Additional overriding benefits include increasing the reliability of the district’s water supply, complying with the Local Agency Formation Commission’s conditions for annexing land within the sphere of influence.

Remaining overriding benefits include avoiding multiple waterline crossings of the Santa Maria River and the associated environmental impacts and slowing the depletion of groundwater above sea level.

Impacts reduced to insignificance through mitigation measures address land use and planning, groundwater quality and surface water quality, habitat, protected species, erosion, aesthetics, cultural resources, traffic, noise and air quality.

REPORT AVAILABLE FOR REVIEW:

— A copy of the final environmental impact report for the pipeline to carry supplemental water from Santa Maria to Nipomo is available for public review.

— The document is at the Nipomo Community Services District office, 148 S. Wilson St., and online at <http://nipomocsd.com>.

mhodgson@theadobepress.com