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Plans for Nipomo pipeline move ahead

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Nipomo residents are a step closer to getting a new source of water after an approval Wednesday of the environmental impact report of a massive pipeline project.

The Board of Directors for the Nipomo Community Services District voted unanimously to approve the final EIR of a project that would connect a pipeline from Nipomo's to Santa Maria's water systems.

The board will decide whether to approve the project May 13.

Construction would begin in late 2010.

The initial phase of the pipeline would cost \$21 million. That construction is expected to supply up to 3,000 acre-feet of water per year.

Of that, 2,500 acre-feet would meet existing customer demands and help replenish the community's groundwater basin. The remaining 500 acre-feet would be for future customers on land within the district's boundaries.

The next phase of the proposed project would cost an estimated \$16 million and supply an additional 3,300 acre-feet of water per year.

Nipomo's water supply is in jeopardy as water continues to be drafted at a higher rate than it's restored in the basin, said Bruce Buel, the district's general manager.

The district has discussed providing a new water source in the community for years.

"This is a very important step forward and it has been a long time coming," Director Mike Winn said.

Winn said some might think that the new pipeline would allow a boom in development in Nipomo.

But he said most of the supplemental water in the initial phase would meet existing water demands, and he doesn't believe significant increases in development would occur with an additional water source.

During public comment, Jennifer Jozwiak, vice chair of the Surfrider Foundation of San Luis Obispo Bay, said she wants reclaimed water to be used for Nipomo's drinking water instead of building a pipeline.

"We shouldn't have to rely on state water and Santa Maria's water to be our answer," said Jozwiak, a Nipomo resident. "State water is not reliable. We should be looking at our own water sources."

But, Buel said, the district has maximized the amount of recycled water it can use. And it still isn't enough to meet demands and keep from exhausting groundwater resources, he said.

And directors pointed out that Santa Maria's water supply includes various sources, including groundwater in the Santa Barbara County, as well as state water.

To pay for the initial \$21 million building costs of the pipeline, directors unanimously approved Wednesday the formation of an assessment district, which would establish a system to charge Nipomo property owners for the construction.

Wallace Group, the district's consultant, is working on how to assess the charges, which would be based on the type of ownership, size of the parcel, land use and other factors.

Ratepayers would have to pay an estimated \$10 to \$20 per month for the capital costs over a 30-year period in the initial phase, Buel said. They would pay between \$17 and \$30 per month for the ongoing operation and maintenance of the project.

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