



What's cost of selling water?

Joan Leon/Looking Forward | Posted: Friday, January 1, 2010 12:00 am

The Nipomo Community Services District (NCSD) plans to buy water from the city of Santa Maria, a lot of water.

That item will be on the City Council agenda for Tuesday, Jan. 5. The concern is that city water quality may suffer. When the State Water Project cannot deliver high-quality water, we will have to rely on mineral-filled ground water.

The current environmental impact report (EIR) describes the proposed project. NCSD would construct a pipeline from Santa Maria's water treatment facility, go under the levee and under agriculture land to the river bank, drill diagonally under the river to the Nipomo Mesa, with a pumping station and storage tanks there, then connect to an existing pipeline on Orchard Road in Nipomo.

Water delivery to Nipomo is scheduled to be in three phases for a total of 6,200 acre-feet a year (AFY) of water coming from Santa Maria — State Water blended with water released from the Twitchell Reservoir into the groundwater basin, the same as we get in the city.

Nipomo will pay the city the same as ratepayers in the city pay, which currently on the lowest tier is \$2.563, based on 100 to 500 cubic feet. A planned 5-percent rate increase in July will be to \$2.691.

Remember that lawsuit about who owns the ground water? The court settlement granted Santa Maria 14,300 AFY of Twitchell water. The court also said that Santa Maria must comply with ground water adjudication.

There is a stipulation that "the Nipomo Community Services District and Santa Maria shall employ their best efforts to timely implement the Nipomo Supplemental Water project ..."

The city staff report of Dec. 1 on this sale of water states: "The city has water of sufficient quality and quantity to supply supplemental water to Nipomo and therefore, there are no significant environmental impacts to the city."

A chart in the staff report acknowledges that State Water Project (SWP) water deliveries in a normal year are 13,706 AFY, but in dry years go down to 5,874 AFY. However, the chart lists Twitchell deliveries as 14,300 AFY every year, regardless if it is normal or a dry year.

Remember that we had to improve the quality of our groundwater, and that was one reason to import high-quality State Water. If there is enough water, why does the staff report say, "The city is in discussions with county of Santa Barbara, Central Coast Water Authority, and other local agencies in the attempt to acquire more high-quality State Water"?

If the city must buy more water, the staff report says the sale of water to NCSD will be "revenue neutral in worst-case scenarios," and will generate revenue in most instances. The agreement between the city and NCSD says the city "may substitute or combine new or additional replacement sources of water but must be at least equal in reliability, quality, pressure and environmental impact to the source being replaced."

Nipomo CSD can then sell its imported water to other purveyors in the Nipomo area.

Santa Maria has been using water as a commodity for years, selling reclaimed water. If the city must buy additional high-quality water to maintain the state requirement to reduce Santa Maria's total dissolved solids, the revenue from Nipomo must be enough to cover the cost.

Nipomo is basing future growth on this water supply. By guaranteeing a reliable, high-quality water supply to Nipomo until 2036 and beyond, there is surely an impact on Santa Maria.

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