

## Water Crisis on the Nipomo Mesa Fact or Fiction??

Prepared by the Mesa Community Alliance  
Spring 2011

## Who are the Mesa water users?

water use in AF/yr

• Nipomo Community Services District (NCSD)	2,560
• Woodlands Mutual Water Company	810
• Golden State Water Company	1,290
• Rural Water Company	880
• Conoco Phillips	1,200
• Private wells – both agriculture and households	5,500
Total water used in 2009	<b>12,240 Acre feet/year</b>

## What is the Waterline Intertie Project?

- Construction of a pipeline to connect the City of Santa Maria water system to NCSD water system
- Plan is to import 2,000 – 3,000 acre feet/year
- Nipomo Community Services District pushed the plan in aquifer water litigation that began in 1997
- Plan is binding on signers to the 2005 Stipulation Agreement and commits signers to support the WIP
- **Stipulation provides for cancellation if not feasible**

## What is the total 30-year cost?

**Total \$400 Million**

- \$ 80 M Capital Costs (pipeline, bond costs, interest)
- \$ 52 M Operation & Maintenance to Santa Maria
- \$268 M Water cost to Santa Maria (includes 5%/yr increase)

**Source:** Capital and O&M Costs are based on a Wallace Group report to NCSD on September 9, 2009

Water cost is based on City of Santa Maria charge of \$1,443/acre foot in 2011 with 5% projected increase each year

## How will we pay costs?

- NCS D asked the County to establish an **assessment district that includes the four Mesa water companies**. If approved, bonds would be sold to pay capital costs over 30 years. **The total cost of the project will be charged to those who use less than half of the water**
- Water and maintenance costs will be added to monthly or bimonthly water bills
- Homeowners will be mailed a weighted ballot to approve or disapprove the project this fall or in 2012
- If 50% plus 1 of the **returned** ballots approve the bond, the proposal will pass

## What will Rural customers pay?

Capital cost (property tax)	\$6.6 M
Operation & Maintenance*	4.3 M
Water costs*	22.3 M
Rural Co profit @ 21.7%*	5.7 M

**Average 30-year cost/customer \$42,100**

\*Costs added to monthly water bills for 924 customers

## Who will use the WIP water?

- NCS D will use **ALL** the water imported and will decrease the amount of water pumped by its wells
- **Rural water customers will PAY for the construction and the water but Rural is the only company with NO connection to the NCS D system and the WIP pipeline**

## How did we get here?

The Story of Water Litigation  
and our Aquifer

OR

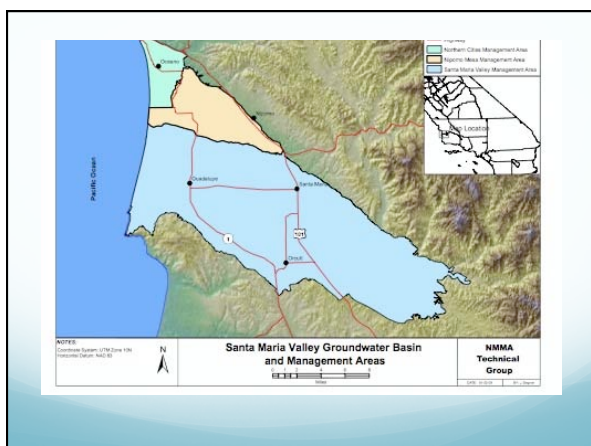
“Whiskey is for drinking, water is for fighting”

## Why was there water litigation?

- In 1997, major lawsuit was filed to determine water rights within the Santa Maria water basin
- 100s of litigants including all Mesa water companies
- Santa Clara Superior Court heard 6+ years of testimony from water experts
- 2008 Judgment affirmed overlying water rights and approved the 2005 Stipulation Agreement
- **The Court determined that the basin was NOT in overdraft now or at any time in the past**

## What were the results of the litigation?

- The Court set up 3 basin management areas: Santa Maria, Nipomo Mesa (NMMA), Northern Cities (NCMA)
- A majority of the litigants signed the Stipulation including all of the Mesa water companies. Others, including long-time area growers, are still litigating
- Each area must submit an annual report to the Court regarding the health of the water supply



## Who protects the MESA water?

- The Stipulation established the **Nipomo Mesa Management Area (NMMA)** and a technical committee of experts from the four suppliers plus Conoco Phillips to monitor and analyze water conditions on the Mesa
- All 3 management areas have prepared and submitted reports for 2008 and 2009. The 2010 reports are in process or have been submitted
- The Mesa has very specific criteria to protect our water supply, based on work by this technical group

## NMMA: 35 years of data— aquifer mirrors rainfall



## What does this show?

- Over 35 years the level of water in the key wells on the Mesa correlates closely with rainfall
- Although water usage has steadily increased from 4,000 acre/feet/year in 1975 to 12,000 acre feet/year in 2010, the increased usage does not appear to affect the key wells levels
- **There is no study or research that suggests the WIP will have any effect on the key well index**
- **The key well index is the basis for trigger points that protect our water supply**

## NMMA: Trigger points protect our water supply

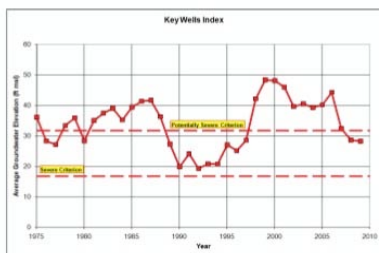


Figure 7-3. Key Wells Index. The upper dashed line is the criterion for Potentially Severe Water Shortage Conditions and the lower dashed line is the criterion for Severe Conditions.

## What is NCS D's justification for the WIP?

NCS D claims seawater intrusion is imminent

However, a 2004 study commissioned by SLO County states:

“associated potential impact such as seawater intrusion ... is not an imminent threat ... a time lag of many decades is likely before heavy groundwater pumping... results in evidence of seawater intrusion near the coastline”

Underlining has been added

## Will the WIP HELP our water supply?

- The Waterline Intertie Project will NOT guarantee a good reliable source of supplemental water to the Mesa in times of drought
- Extended drought will also affect Santa Maria and State Water Project water supply inhibiting water delivery
- Pumping and transporting water that will flow north anyway may deplete the Mesa's normal flow, especially in times of drought
- **We have time to explore better options:** rainfall doubled the average this past winter and will keep our aquifer strong for quite a while

## Final thoughts

The MCA committee suggests the following:

- In 2011 our basin is healthy
- The Court (through its technical groups) is monitoring the basin conditions to ensure the basin remains healthy and to protect our water supply from sea water intrusion and over-pumping
- There are better alternatives than the WIP -- use the NMMA technical group expertise to evaluate the merits of all proposed water projects on the Mesa
- **For the future, the County needs to establish regional planning efforts to develop cost-effective solutions that are fair to ALL present and future Mesa residents**

## PLEASE SIGN our petition

- Asks SLO County to file a brief with the Santa Clara Court **to remove Section VI A that describes the pipeline project in the Stipulation** because the cost of the WIP is unreasonable, does not improve the health of the Basin, and will not provide protection from inadequate water supplies or seawater intrusion.
- Petitions will be presented to the SLO Board of Supervisors