

CITIZEN COMMENTARY

Experts discuss Mesa water supply

By Ed Eby/Nipomo Community Services District

A standing-room-only gathering of nearly 400 concerned residents heard about the precarious state of our water supply during the "Water on the Mesa" presentation Aug. 23 at Nipomo High School.

The water supply on the Nipomo Mesa was reported to be in jeopardy based on reports from several groups of registered professional geologists.

These expert groups included the California Department of Water Resources, the court-authorized Nipomo Mesa Management Area Technical Group, the Northern Cities Management Area Technical Group and the Interlocutory Stipulated Judgment Working Group.

The data from water experts showed that:

* Water levels under the Mesa have steadily dropped as population increased since 2000 (Nipomo Mesa Management Area Technical Group);

* Many well levels are below sea level (Nipomo Mesa and Northern Cities management areas technical groups);

* Our wells are pumping nearly twice the amount of water as is being replaced by rainfall (Department of Water Resources, Nipomo Mesa technical group);

* The Nipomo Mesa's proximity to the ocean puts our fresh water aquifer at risk for seawater intrusion (Department of Water Resources);

* Seawater intrusion in Los Osos advanced an additional mile inland between 2005 and 2009 (Interlocutory Stipulated Judgment Working Group); and,

* Seawater intrusion occurred in May and October of 2009 in Oceano (Northern Cities Management Area Technical Group).

The unanimous conclusions of the water experts two years in a row were:

* Potentially severe water shortage conditions have existed on the Nipomo Mesa since 2008 (Nipomo Mesa technical group); and,

* Nipomo Community Services District should import water with the supplemental water project as soon as possible (Nipomo Mesa technical group).

Unlike our neighbors to the north and south, the Nipomo Mesa has only a single source of fresh water — the groundwater pumped from beneath us.

We have no access to lakes, rivers, reservoirs or imported water pipelines. There is no backup if our single water supply is contaminated or otherwise compromised.

As a result of the data and recommendations from the water experts, NCSD conducted exhaustive trade studies to determine the best solution to reduce the risk of losing our fresh water supply to seawater intrusion.

The least expensive and lowest-risk solution was found to be the importation of water from the city of Santa Maria's highly reliable water system.

The cost for a pipeline from Santa Maria would be spread among the customers for that water in NCSD, Golden State Water Co., Woodlands Mutual Water Co. and Rural Water Co. boundaries.

The Nipomo Mesa Management Area Technical Group will present its third annual report to the public at 7 p.m. Thursday at Nipomo High School.

This report by the technical experts will describe the water shortage conditions on the Nipomo Mesa and highlight areas of concern for seawater intrusion.

Ed Eby is a member of the Nipomo Community Services District board of directors. He can be reached through the district office at 929-1133. Information presented at the Aug. 23 meeting is available at www.ncsd.ca.gov by clicking on "Water Shortage News."