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## Property owners hear pipeline assessment estimates

By Mike Hodgson/Associate Editor

Latest estimates of how much Nipomo Mesa water customers will pay if they approve a supplemental water pipeline assessment district were delivered at two workshops this week.

Although the numbers likely will change, they show Woodlands Mutual Water Co. customers would pay the most, while Golden State Water Co. customers would pay the least.

Nipomo Community

Services District representatives delivered the numbers to Woodlands residents Monday night and to NCSD and Golden State customers Wednesday night.

Rural Water Co. customers heard their figures Jan. 23.

Current estimates indicate Woodlands customers would be assessed a maximum of \$2,700 per benefit unit, which could be paid off in a single lump sum of \$2,200 per unit or in \$225-per-unit annual payments for 30 years.

NCSD customers' maximum assessment would be \$1,800 per benefit unit, with a cash payoff of \$1,500 per unit or annual payments of \$130 per unit.

Rural Water customers would be assessed a maximum of \$1,400 per benefit unit, with a lump sum payment of \$1,100 per unit or annual payments of \$120 per unit.

Golden State customers' maximum assessment would be \$840 per benefit unit, with a cash payoff of \$700 per unit or annual payments of \$75 per unit.

Property owners learned how many benefit units were assigned to their parcels through letters sent out about three weeks ago.

"The 30-year financed number is very conservatively high using a rate nearly double what a bond sale today would yield, but (the) land-secured bond market remains volatile," said NCSD General Manager Michael LeBrun.

NCSD is proposing to build a pipeline to initially bring 2,500 acre-feet of water to the Mesa from Santa Maria to offset the amount being pumped from the Nipomo Groundwater Basin by the four purveyors.

Of the estimated

\$25.2 million project

cost, \$2.3 million would

be paid with a state grant, with the balance covered by a bond issue.

The bonds would be repaid with property assessments.

Project opponents say the pipeline will not bring in "new water" because the Nipomo basin is part of the larger Santa Maria Valley Groundwater Basin; the project and the water purchased from Santa Maria will be too expensive; and better alternatives are available.

LeBrun noted the estimated costs per benefit unit likely will change before assessment district ballots are mailed in mid-March.

Property owners have until Thursday, Feb. 16, to request changes in their benefit units. NCSD directors plan to finalize revised assignments Feb. 29.

Ballots would be due in early May.

The amount property owners would pay per benefit unit varies because each purveyor will fund a different percentage of the project, and purveyors have different numbers and types of customers to share the cost, he said.

Benefit units are assigned to parcels based on a property's size and how much water it could use if fully built out to the level its zoning will allow.

"This can be seen as a share in pipeline capacity," LeBrun said of the benefit units.

Just how much customers' rates will increase also is unknown.

"Actual water use will drive the cost folks pay once we deliver and begin paying for this water," LeBrun said.

But he said NCSD customers' rates will climb toward the level Santa Maria city customers pay and will become comparable to rates in Arroyo Grande, Grover Beach and Oceano.