

Nipomo pipeline project expensive but necessary
Critics' arguments against the proposal simply don't pan out

The Tribune

Property owners in the Nipomo area soon will vote on whether to increase their property taxes to pay for a \$26 million pipeline to import water from Santa Maria.

The question isn't so much whether the water is needed; even opponents of the project acknowledge that it makes sense to have another source of water. Rather, the debate is over whether Santa Maria water is the best source. Those opposed to the tax measure point to other projects — especially desalination — as better alternatives.

We recognize that the pipeline will be expensive. If approved, Nipomo-area property owners will not only see their taxes increase, they'll also pay higher water rates. However, we believe changing course at this point would be a huge and costly mistake.

The Nipomo Community Services District has done the groundwork. It has conducted three separate studies on supplemental water alternatives over a period of nearly 20 years. Importing Santa Maria water, combined with conservation, has consistently ranked as the least costly and most easily achieved project.

Desal remains a possibility down the road, but it would take millions more dollars and many, many more years to accomplish.

Just look at Cambria's experience; it's been trying for decades to build a desalination plant, only to have proposals rejected by the California Coastal Commission.

Even if Nipomo managed to expedite permitting and funding of a desal plant, a pipeline would still be needed to transport water, on top of other expenses.

Other arguments against the pipeline don't pan out either:

Opponents say the pipeline will induce growth. That same argument can be made for any water project.

Opponents living in the area served by Rural Water, a for-profit water company, point out that they are being asked to help pay for the project, yet they won't receive Santa Maria water. That's true. However, other areas of Nipomo will be able to reduce their groundwater pumping. That will improve the health and reliability of the basin, and that will benefit Rural Water customers.

Opponents who live outside the boundaries of the Nipomo Community Services District don't like the idea that the district will be in charge of the project. Again, any project will require a lead agency to take charge, and the Nipomo district is the logical entity.

Opponents maintain the pipeline won't introduce any new water to the basin; it will move around the water that's already here. In a sense, that's true. However, opponents neglect to say that water will be transferred from an area where there's a surplus — Santa Maria — to an area where there's a documented shortage.

Opponents accuse the Nipomo Community Services District of fabricating a report of seawater intrusion in an Oceano well. They point to a letter the Oceano Community Services District recently issued that denies the report of seawater intrusion.

Our take: This is a big red herring. Even if seawater intrusion never occurred in Oceano, there are other signs that the basin is in trouble.

A pumping depression — an area around a well where the water table dips — was documented on the Nipomo Mesa years ago.

A judge who presided over a big water rights lawsuit cited that depression as evidence of a problem with the basin. After years of expensive litigation, the parties in that case proposed a solution that became a judicial order. As part of that solution, the Nipomo Community Services District agreed to import water from Santa Maria.

Now, at the eleventh hour, opponents are objecting to the cost of the pipeline and pointing to desal as a preferred alternative.

That's a pipe dream.

It would be a grave mistake to turn down an approved project — one that will guarantee a reliable source of water for decades to come — on a gamble that a desal plant might materialize some day.

As we've seen again and again, putting off a project today often leads to far greater expense later; the Los Osos sewer project is a prime example of that.

We strongly urge Nipomo-area property owners to vote in favor of the Santa Maria pipeline project.

Editorials are the opinion of The Tribune.

Vote No

First:

It's not a question of if we should do the pipe or Desal.

The question is do we have to do the pipe and Desal?

NCSB board members have made it clear that the Pipe to Santa Maria is only a temporary solution until we get Desal.

The NCSB board requires new connections to pay a fee to fund a desal plant in the future. (based on Desal having a lower cost per AF than the pipe)

So it's not "a solution" at best it's only a "Temporary solution".

I think it's a temporary solution that is not needed.

Second:

The Santa Maria supply is not "reliable"

Santa Maria does claim to have "excess water" in the report but what is that report based on?

It was not long ago at trial that the City of Santa Maria claimed there was a 20,000 to 30,000 AF shortage.

CROSS-COMPLAINT OF THE CITY OF SANTA MARIA, page 2 paragraph 7

"Santa Maria is informed and believes and upon that basis alleges the Basin has been overdrafted for more than five (5) consecutive years immediately prior to the commencement of this action. Total annual demands upon the Basin have greatly exceeded, and do now exceed, the average annual supply of Basin water from natural sources. There has been a progressive and general lowering of Basin water levels; the available natural supply has been and is being gradually and increasingly depleted; and if demands upon the Basin are not limited, the Basin will be exhausted."

SCWC Cross-Complaint page 7 paragraph 24:

"SCWC is informed and believes and on that basis alleges that groundwater pumping in the Basin has exceeded natural recharge for decades and therefore the Basin was and continues to be in overdraft. SCWC is informed and believes and on that basis alleges that the **total groundwater pumping exceeds natural replenishment by about 20,000 to 30,000 acre feet per year**. Many studies

conducted and made public over the years by various public agencies and private consultants have confirmed that the Basin is in overdraft. (See, e.g., Santa Barbara County Water Agency, Santa Maria Valley Water Resources Report (1994); City of Santa Maria Long-Term Water Management Plan (1991); City of Santa Maria Preliminary State Project Water Implementation Study (1991); Joint Water Committee White Paper: A Summary of the Santa Maria Valley Water Problems and Alternatives (1988); Department of Water Resources, Santa Barbara County State Water Project Alternatives (1985).) Although pumped groundwater is replenished to a limited degree through the operation of the Twitchell Project, groundwater levels have been in a declining trend on a continuous basis since the early part of this century. SCWC is informed and believes and on that basis alleges that the Basin has been in overdraft for at least five years prior to the filing of this action.”

http://www.nonewwiptax.com/Pages/Groundwater_Litigation.html

The Judge did not agree with Santa Maria or GSWC about the overdraft but the Judge did not find there was extra water.

No one has done a study to show there is “excess water” in the basin

We are still waiting for that study, See the Santa Maria Valley TG report, 2009 report page 37

“On the same matter, Santa Maria should complete its analysis of the availability of surplus water in the SMVMA (surplus to all the needs in the SMVMA) whereby some can be exported beyond the SMVMA. Coincident with the preceding, Santa Maria should also complete its analysis of the sources, pumping locations, and potential impacts of groundwater pumping that would be exported beyond the SMVMA.”

http://www.nonewwiptax.com/Pages/Technical_Group_Documents.html

and Third:

The water rights are still in litigation and any outcome is speculative at this point because it's being appealed. See appeal at documents

http://www.nonewwiptax.com/Pages/Groundwater_Litigation.html

Brad Snook

I haven't read any solid evidence that the Santa Maria Water Basin (groundwater in Nipomo) is polluted by nitrates like in Los Osos. Nipomo and Los Osos are completely different cases, with the only similarity being that water is involved.

"It would be a grave mistake to turn down an approved project"... unless YOU are the people who will be paying for it! And, what are you paying for? You already have water. You are paying for the perceived risk that that water will be lost. How about just doing a better job protecting the water that's already here?

\$25 million could go a long way toward protecting the water resources that are already here. Santa Maria does not have surplus water, they have extra water that they've contracted for with the State. On the whole, our state has a shortage of water. When you look at the big picture, that is not a surplus. A report from UC Davis released this week shows our state is riddled with polluted aquifers. The State's water resource managers need to do a better job getting water to where it's absolutely needed NOW. Santa Maria should work with the State to renegotiate the surplus to where it's need NOW. Public health is at risk.

Pismo will spend about \$5 million to upgrade their Waste Water Treatment Plant to tertiary treatment. They'd like to use it in developing newly annexed land. Without developing Price Canyon, that's about 1.8 million gallons/day that Pismo and surrounding communities could use, not for drinking, but for many other uses. South SLO County Sanitation District discharges 2.8 million gallons per day into the ocean. That's water that could be re-used, as well, and grant money could be available if the District can show treated water is needed. It is needed to assure the long-term health of the Santa Maria Groundwater Basin. It's time for a regional approach to dealing with our water supply problems.

Check out Surfrider's "The Cycle of Insanity"

<http://vimeo.com/10328536>

And, most of all, stop talking about Desalination. With the Once-through cooling at Diablo, you will be adding another nail to the coffin of our county's natural marine environment (or, what's left of it)

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dafaxman 1 comment collapsed Collapse Expand 1. The editorial reference to Los Osos was not about nitrates. It was about how detractors caused delays in the sewer project making its cost go from around \$20M to around \$200M. We don't need that in Nipomo. 2. Santa Maria does have excess water. Read their 2010 Urban Water Management Plan. They have access to about 50,000 acre-feet per year (see Table 4-1), and they use about 13,000 acre-feet per year now (see Table 3-2) and expect to use 20,000 acre-feet per year in 2035 (see Table 3-12). 3. I disagree that we should stop talking about desal. Since it takes 15-20+ years to get a desal plant in operation, planning should begin now. Meanwhile we need supplemental water to avoid seawater intrusion.

Read more here: <http://www.sanluisobispo.com/2012/03/18/1994623/nipomo-pipeline-project-expensive.html#storylink=cpy>