

## **Viewpoint: Nipomo pipeline a dead-end idea**

By Mesa Community Alliance Steering Committee  
Mesa Community Alliance Steering Committee

The Mesa Community Alliance opposes the Nipomo pipeline project and sends a nitrate-laden, water-filled brickbat to The Tribune for its error-filled endorsement.

The Tribune supports the Nipomo Community Services District pipeline project as expensive but necessary and describes opposition arguments as eleventh-hour objections.

MCA, “the opposition” disagrees. “Eleventh hour” is hardly a description of our research. MCA formed in the fall of 2010 to provide Mesa residents with a voice on issues that affect our quality of life. We immediately began work on two issues: air and water quality, and have been meeting regularly for 18 months.

Our research and support assisted the passage of the air quality rule to stop the air pollution from the dunes. And after poring through hundreds of documents, we are convinced that this pipeline is a very bad plan that will not cure any water problems. It also will drain more than \$300 million from the Mesa that should be used for better solutions. MCA asks all homeowners who receive a ballot to vote no and return it in the envelope provided. Only returned ballots are counted.

The Mesa water supply rises and falls with rainfall. The Mesa Technical Group appointed by the court has produced a chart that clearly documents that connection. For the past 35 years, population increases have not had any effect on the water supply. The Technical Group has noted a depression and recommends a well management plan to balance water use. MCA supports that plan because we note that this depression is likely caused by NCSD and Conoco Phillips pumping excessive amounts of water from a small area near the intersection of Willow Road and Highway 1.

MCA opposes the pipeline because the water it brings will not be reliable or healthy in times of drought. Santa Maria has excessive nitrates in its groundwater. State-required tests for Santa Maria for 2006 through 2009 show very high nitrate levels in four of its six wells. Upper-level readings reached 78 to 100 parts per million over the four years. The state standard for public drinking water is a maximum of 45 parts per million.

Santa Maria purchases state water because of its nitrate problem. When rainfall is plentiful, the city receives as much as 13,000 acre-feet. But the supply of state water is unpredictable. In 2008 and 2009 — minor drought years — Santa Maria received 7,600 acre-feet. Already in 2012, Santa Maria has had to pump 25 percent of its water from the ground. MCA opposes paying excessive rates for nitrate-laden water that will endanger our citizens’ health.

If Mesa residents support this pipeline, we will be signing a 30-year contract to allow Santa Maria and NCSD to determine our water rates. If 3,000 acre-feet of water begins to flow through the pipeline in 2014, the cost including assessment will be approximately \$2,500 per acre-foot.

NCSD's customers will see water bills escalate from \$70 bimonthly for 36 units in July 2012 to \$148 in July 2014. And Santa Maria has a history of raising water rates 5 percent every year. Only 45 percent of the Mesa's residents will share this cost.

MCA supports solutions that produce new water and make proven fiscal sense. As a short-term solution, we advocate reclaiming the 3,000 acre-feet of wastewater that the South SLO County Sanitation District dumps into the ocean every year near Oceano. When the state makes reclaiming wastewater mandatory, the county will be forced to reclaim this water. Cleaning that water to a tertiary level will enable its use on golf courses and irrigation to reduce groundwater pumping.

We also advocate brackish water desalination that uses a mixture of fresh and ocean water. A Sand City, Monterey County project using brackish water was built in five years for just \$12 million and is capable of producing 700 acre-feet. The California Coastal Commission unanimously approved these plans in just four months. Total costs are approximately \$2,700 per acre-foot, including 10 years amortization of construction cost. Morro Bay has recently added two brackish water plants. When Morro Bay implements energy saving devices, they believe costs may drop to about \$1,300 per acre-foot. Desal is not a pipe dream. With excellent planning, it can produce reasonable new water supplies.

Mesa Community Alliance is a public benefit corporation. Steering Committee members include Liam Bennett, Rudy Bezmarivich, Reggie Dion, Bill Dorland, Pat Eby, Vince McCarthy, Bill Petrick, Arlene Versaw and Larry Versaw.

Read more here: <http://www.sanluisobispo.com/2012/03/25/2003792/viewpoint-nipomo-pipeline-a-dead.html#storylink=cpy>