

County puts flood funds toward MST

Supervisors invest in regional water lobbying effort

By *DAVID RYAN*

*Register Staff Writer*

Wednesday, December 19, 2007

 **BOOKMARK**

Lobbying efforts cost money, and the Napa County Board of Supervisors is preparing to pay the piper to lobby for a potentially expensive water project in east Napa.

Supervisors voted unanimously Tuesday to pay \$250,000 for the county's membership in a regional organization that might bring federal and state money to a what could be a multi-million dollar project to build a recycled water pipeline to the Coombsville area.

Property owners in the area known as Miliken-Sarco-Tulocay area — or MST — for the creeks that run through it, face depleted aquifers and many claim that their wells no longer deliver. Not all property owners in the area have drying wells, though, adding complexity to the political solution the Board of Supervisors has to concoct.

In October, angry property owners fed up with county delays urged the Board to act as fast as possible to fix a situation more than a decade in the making — but they also asked the board to make sure the project didn't cost too much money.

County officials have considered an assessment on MST property owners to pay for the project, but are uncertain about whether the residents will support it.

### **Taking the pulse**

As a result, the board also ordered county staff to partner with the Napa Sanitation District — the agency that would supply the recycled water — to perform a professional survey of the landowners in the MST area.

Property tax assessment democracy is a strange cousin to its more direct one-person-one-vote system that elects candidates. In the case of an assessment, the larger the landowner the bigger the vote, because it's assumed the larger landowners get the most benefit and pay the highest price for improvements that property tax assessments bring.

The Board of Supervisors voted to put plans in motion to take \$250,000 in Measure A flood money in coming months to enter into a partnership with Napa Sanitation District and regional group of agencies from Sonoma and Marin counties. The regional group is hoping that by working together, it will have more pull in Sacramento and Washington, D.C. political circles to get money to subsidize recycled water projects.

Yet the Board of Supervisors was also concerned that MST taxpayers not be entirely saddled with the cost to the county, should it decide to go forward. Supervisor Bill Dodd urged the rest of the board to negotiate with Napa Sanitation District to see if it would consider the benefits to its customers of having recycled water pumped to the MST area.

Napa Sanitation District has come under increasing pressure from water regulators to limit the amount of recycled water it dumps into the Napa River during the summer.

Supervisors Mark Luce, who sat on the board of directors for the Napa Sanitation District in years past, said his understanding is that NSD leaders feel the agency will be in compliance with federal regulators for years to come. Luce also said he felt Napa Sanitation District would build a pipeline if it could find a financing partner, but perhaps not at the expense of the district.

"I think its an open question of how they're going to spend ratepayer's money," he said.

In the end, the Board of Supervisors voted to send Supervisors Harold Moskowitz and Dodd, to negotiate with the Napa Sanitation District. Dodd and Moskowitz's districts include parts of the MST area.