

Marin, North Bay get \$25 million federal boost for recycled water

By Mark Prado

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Marin will see more recycled water in the coming years thanks to a \$25 million federal grant to help green business landscapes, schools, parks and cemeteries without dipping into reservoirs.

The North Bay Water Reuse Authority - which includes agencies in San Rafael and Novato - received the money as part of the Omnibus Public Lands Management Act signed into law by President Barack Obama last week.

"These federal funds will allow us to move forward with a variety of projects to expand the use of recycled water for urban irrigation, including parks, schools and golf courses, and agricultural irrigation to supplement local water supplies," said Bill Long, chairman of the North Bay Water Reuse Authority, a consortium of agencies in Marin, Sonoma and Napa counties that work together on recycled water projects.

The consortium includes the Las Gallinas Valley Sanitary District in San Rafael and the Novato Sanitary District.

Recycled wastewater - which has not been fully treated and can't be used for drinking - is already in use for irrigation throughout the North Bay region, as well as elsewhere in the state and across the nation.

The \$25 million will be doled out over a 10-year period and require local agencies to come up with

\$75 million in matching dollars, which could come from the state, officials said.

In Marin, the first phase of the plan is to provide recycled water to large landscapes, including the Fireman's Fund Insurance Co. and Valley Memorial Park Cemetery sites in Novato, as well as commercial users west of Highway 101. Recycled water is also proposed for landscape irrigation at Hamilton Field, including the Coast Guard housing area.

In all, 744 acre-feet of recycled water would be added to Marin's water supply system annually, saving more than 240 million gallons a year, enough to supply about 2,200 single-family homes with water for a year.

Preliminary engineering work on the first project could start this fall and be operational by 2010, officials said.

"This is great news for our economy and environment," said Supervisor Judy Arnold, who represents the Novato area.

Arnold, along with Novato Councilwoman Carole Dillon-Knutson, lobbied for the funding in Washington D.C.

"I am thrilled to learn of the \$25 million authorization," Dillon-Knutson said. "This is the kind of smart and sustainable program that benefits our whole community."

Long noted more than half of the water used in the North San Pablo Bay region is for outdoor irrigation. Novato is facing water restrictions this summer because of the lack of rain in Sonoma County, which supplies the city with most of its water.

"Surface and groundwater supplies in the three-

county North Bay region are strained, and some groundwater basins are over-pumped," Long said. "The current drought and long-term impacts of global warming highlight the need for additional amounts of reliable and sustainable recycled water."

The Novato Sanitary District, which will have its facilities expanded with the help of the federal dollars, already supplies the StoneTree Golf Course with recycled water - 500,000 gallons a day between mid-April and late October.

"It is a lot of water," said Sandeep Karkal, deputy manager at Novato Sanitary. "Every drop of water that is saved helps."

Valley Memorial Park Cemetery has 42 acres, although it irrigates only 11 acres.

"Using reclaimed water is a great idea," said George Estes, cemetery manager. "We have room to grow here so there is the potential to save a lot of water."

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