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\$30 million water project eyed

Recycled water would be piped to more places

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An effort to increase the use of reclaimed water for irrigation in Novato and elsewhere in the North Bay passed a milestone last week.

The North Bay Water Reuse Authority, which plans to build \$100 million worth of recycled water projects in Marin, Sonoma and Napa counties, had its final environmental impact report certified on Dec. 8.

In Novato, the authority's plans call for using treated sewage water to extend the use of recycled water to irrigate such things as Novato High School's playing fields and Valley Memorial Park, Novato's only cemetery.

Novato currently gets 80 percent of its water from the Russian and Eel River watersheds; it's piped here via an underground aqueduct buried alongside Highway 101.

This summer, Novatans were subject to emergency water conservation measures due to cutbacks in Russian and Eel River water delivered by the Sonoma County Water Agency.

An advantage of using recycled water is that it wouldn't be subject to such cutbacks.

"The benefit it does have is, it's not interrupted," said Chris DeGabriele, General Manager of the North Marin Water District. "It's drought-proof."

Completion of the final environmental report was required before the North Bay Water Reuse Authority could get \$25 million in federal funding that Congress authorized in March 2009.

While the federal money has been authorized, it hasn't yet been appropriated. Once Congress appropriates it, it would help fund the extension of pipelines in Novato to carry treated sewage water for irrigation in two areas:

- The North/Central Service Area: This is a \$20 million network of pipelines to route sewage water treated by the Novato Sanitary District for irrigation at places including Novato High School's athletic fields, the Fireman's Fund office complex, and to Valley Memorial Park cemetery on Bugeia Lane. Federal funding would cover a quarter of the cost, with the remaining \$15 million in local matching funds coming from the North Marin Water District, which would pay 67 percent of the local match, and the Novato Sanitary District, which would pay 33 percent.
- The South Service Area calls for a \$10.3 million network of pipelines to carry reclaimed water from facilities operated by the Las Gallinas Valley Sanitary District and Marin Municipal Water District. The water would be used for landscaping at Hamilton Field, including the U.S. Coast Guard housing. The North Marin Water District would pay 52 percent of the local share cost of \$7.7 million, with the remaining 48 percent covered by the Las Gallinas Valley Sanitary District.

Covering the anticipated local share of these recycled water pipelines is one reason the North Marin Water District raised its sewer connection fee for a new residence on Jan. 1 of this year to \$18,600, up from \$8,600. That connection fee will increase again on Jan. 1 2010, to \$28,600.

The logic behind increasing the cost of connection fees is that new growth would pay for the water that it needs.

"Existing ratepayers would not have to fund it," DeGabriele said.

Beverly James, Manager-Engineer for the Novato Sanitary District, said that the sanitary district would use

low-interest loans from the state to pay its local matching cost.

One reason the sanitary district supports the recycled water project is it will help reach the sanitary district's goal of discharging zero treated wastewater into San Pablo Bay.

Local agencies also are looking for other federal and state grants and loans to cover their share of the project cost.

One potential source of funding is the \$11 billion bond proposal that Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and state lawmakers will put on the ballot next year. The measure would set aside \$1.25 billion for water reuse and conservation.

"We hope that will be a (funding) source," said Chuck Weir, Program Manager for the North Bay Water Reuse Authority.

The state bond monies could be used to cover up to 50 percent of the local match, he said.

Elsewhere in the authority's tri-county area, recycled water would be used for such things as vineyard irrigation in the Sonoma Valley, restoration of the Napa Salt Marsh and in Napa County's Milliken-Sarco-Tulocay Creek, where residents have requested it.

The partners of the North Bay Water Reuse Authority include: Napa Sanitation District, Sonoma Valley County Sanitation District, Las Gallinas Valley Sanitary District and Novato Sanitary District. North Marin Water District and Napa County are also providing financial and technical support for the project.

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