

Op-Ed for the Sonoma Index-Tribune

Water Supply Reaching a Critical Stage

639 Words

By Supervisor Valerie Brown

State water officials are warning of the most significant water crisis in California history. Even above average rainfall this spring won't end the drought in Sonoma County. The past two dry years, a dry winter so far this year, potential climate change impacts, and the need to provide adequate flows to protect habitat for three fish species listed as either threatened and endangered under the Endangered Species Act, will mean cutbacks in water deliveries. Just this week, the Sonoma County Water Agency declared a "dry year" and began reducing releases from Lake Mendocino in accordance with existing regulations and is calling for a minimum 30 percent rationing and up 50 percent rationing if conditions don't improve.

As a result, it is more important than ever for all of us to use water wisely and conserve wherever possible. Fortunately, there is another water source that is environmentally wise, is growing in popularity, and can help provide a sustainable new supply: recycled water.

Many recycled water programs already exist in Sonoma County. One of the newest is the North Bay Water Recycling Program, in which neighboring agencies in Sonoma, Napa and Marin counties are cooperating in an effort to expand the use of recycled water and increase their ability to obtain state and federal funding for their projects. It is a regional approach that provides economies of scale for the necessary planning, engineering and environmental studies.

In Sonoma County, the North Bay Water Recycling Program is expanding the existing use of recycled water in Sonoma Valley to offset agriculture (groundwater pumping) and urban (landscaping, etc) usage and also for several parks, including Arnold Park, Field of Dreams, The Plaza, Hughes Field, Depot Park and Ernie Smith Park. The project was one of the management strategies recommended during the Sonoma Valley Basin Advisory Panel (BAP) meetings. Its implementation would

strategically offset groundwater pumping in the areas where there is saline water intrusion. In addition, recycled water from the North Bay Recycling Program would be used to assist in the restoration of the Napa Salt Marsh. Marin and Napa county partners are also planning several projects in their service areas.

Water recycling, like recycling cans, bottles and paper, is a smart and efficient use of resources. Recycled water can take pressure off our drinking water supplies by providing reliable water supply for the irrigation of landscapes, agriculture lands, wetland restoration and stream flows for riparian habitat and fisheries recovery.

Recycled water has been used safely and effectively for decades throughout the region, state and nation, including irrigation for San Francisco's Golden Gate Park since 1932. Locally, it is used in Santa Rosa, Rohnert Park, Petaluma, the Town of Windsor, Calistoga, St. Helena, Yountville, Napa, San Rafael, Novato, San Francisco, San Jose, Sunnyvale, Santa Clara, Daly City and other Bay Area communities. These uses have been proven safe and reliable for people as well as the environment.

Environmental studies are currently being conducted to analyze potential benefits and impacts associated with North Bay Water Recycling Program. A combined Environmental Impact Statement/ Environmental Impact Report will be available early in spring 2009. Public meetings and hearings will be held to discuss the project and receive comments from the public. To learn more about this exciting new program, or to be placed on a list to receive more information, please visit the project website at www.nbwra.org or call us at (707) 547-1923.

Expanding use of recycled water, coupled with water conservation, is critical for the water supply of our communities and the region. The North Bay Water Recycling Program is an important and sustainable part of the solution that will help us meet our current and future water supply needs.

Supervisor Valerie Brown represents the First Supervisorial District, which includes Sonoma Valley. She is also a director on the board of the Sonoma County Water Agency.

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