

Stage IV: The Challenge of Meeting Community Water Needs

The mission of the Nipomo Community Services District is to provide its customers with reliable, quality, and cost-effective services now and in the future.

Balancing water resources in California is a way of life. It demands our attention and takes up our time and money. It requires us to consider terms like “fair” and “equitable.” It stirs up controversy and polarizes communities. From the highest Federal regulatory agency to water providers such as the Nipomo Community Services District (NCSD), the role government plays in protecting water supplies is deep rooted and essential.

With water, appropriating equally and equitably may be similar but the terms are not the same. When it comes to conservation, water users on the Mesa are divided into two categories: those who must conserve water and those who are expected to conserve water. Under the Nipomo Mesa Management Area Technical Group's current Water Shortage Condition Stage IV requirement, customers served by water providers on the Mesa must show a 50% reduction in their groundwater pumping. Overlying landowners on the Mesa are expected to limit their groundwater pumping to 110% of their highest usage prior to July 2015 but are not required to demonstrate this reduction. Here again, “must conserve” and “expected to conserve” are not the same.

Everyone is expected to conserve water, but the conservation expectation between residential and agricultural users is measurably different. Water use and conservation efforts in the Santa Maria Groundwater Basin were defined and divided between stipulating parties in a compromise completed and memorialized in the June 2008 Judgement provided by the Court. Opinions regarding actions ordered by the Court for stipulating parties may drive controversy, but they must be followed. The fact is the Judgement requires NCSD to bring 2,500 acre-feet of water onto the Mesa.

NCSD, Golden State Water Company and Woodlands Mutual Water Company provide water to their customers on the Mesa. These customers are responsible for the cost of protecting their water supply and, as a consequence, the overlying landowners' water supply. Overlying landowners have superior water rights than the customers served by these water providers. Laws that govern water rights are created and tested in the courts. It is in the court room that the terms such as “fair” and “equitable” are discussed and refined, not in the Board rooms of local water providers.

NCSD's Board strives to provide good governance by engaging with its community to discuss issues for the purpose of developing an appropriate response in a timely manner. The challenge of providing adequate water in this time of drought has successfully been met using this strategy. A decision reached years ago to direct resources to bring supplemental water onto the Mesa was controversial, no doubt. But the current import of 800 acre feet of water, now flowing through the Supplemental Water Project onto the Mesa, couldn't have come at a better time. Through ongoing conservation efforts and imported water from Santa Maria, NCSD can meet the water needs of its community while protecting the groundwater basin as required now and in the future.

Until next time...