

What is the cost of not having water?

Add the cost of water to the list of reasons living in California is so expensive. Maybe the perception that water is expensive is because we compare with how much it cost in the communities where we came from. It could be that organizations providing water simply charge too much or people running these organizations are not up to the challenge. The reasons we are seeing double digit water rate increases year after year could be because there are more people in an environment not capable of providing more water without more infrastructure. Whatever the reason, living with the high cost of water seems to be the new norm up and down the Central Coast.

Many people who move to the Central Coast may come from areas where water is not as big of an issue as it is here. Parts of the country, and even parts of California, have an abundance of water. Like any commodity, if there is plenty to go around, the cost is generally less. We all understand the supply and demand model. But is the water shortage real or just the result of poor management of a critical resource?

The challenge to provide a reliable water supply for the Central Coast was recognized and documented in the early 1980s. At that time the population in San Luis Obispo County was 155,000. Today the population is 283,000. Over the last 27 years there have been millions of dollars spent on water projects to provide an adequate and reliable water supply for a population that has nearly doubled. However, we continue to find ourselves in periods of critical water shortage. With the evidence before us, it could be argued that not enough has been done.

Like other water agencies, the Nipomo Community Services District recently needed to adjust its water rates. The new rates will provide for a reliable water supply for the community. A reliable supply requires diligent maintenance of equipment that can deliver adequate water on demand to every customer's tap. While not a double-digit increase year over year, the 9% average increase has a real impact on customers. It is not an easy task for any organization to raise fees. Developing responsible rates means budgeting to maintain and replace aging infrastructure as well as planning to secure a reliable source of water.

The Central Coast has a unique set of water consumers in that most recognize the water reality we live in and the need to add to the security of that water supply. With only a vulnerable groundwater basin to draw from, communities on the Nipomo Mesa committed to do something. The Nipomo Supplemental Water Project changed the water reality on the Mesa, but it came with a price. Approximately one-third of the community's water needs were met last year by imported water through the Project. While the debate continues over the need for the project, it is clear that without water provided by this project, the community would face greater conservation measures during years of drought.

The future water challenges for our area will no doubt continue as will the need to commit funding to meet those challenges. While we contemplate the cost/benefit of water projects, consideration should be given to the question, what is the cost of not having water? By taking responsible action, communities on the Nipomo Mesa have secured another source of water supply and, for the foreseeable future, don't have to address this question.

Until next time...

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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.