

Bringing Clarity to a Crucial Water Decision

By Jerry Gruber and Bob Gresens

Cambria residents have a decision to make between now and July 24 on the rate proposal to finance a new emergency water supply project. We want that decision to be an informed one, based on facts. So it's time to set the record straight on some of the claims that have appeared in the mail or on these pages.

Last week, Cambria residents received a mailer from a group calling itself "Cambrians for Fiscal Responsibility" that offers several false or misleading reasons to protest the proposed rates. Going down the list, they are:

- *It is not "remotely likely" that the project will be done "before year's end."* False. The project is due to be finished early in November. It will indeed serve to help us get through the current water emergency, especially if heavy rains do not arrive early. And it will serve us in droughts to come.
- *The project will waste 134.4 acre-feet of water during a tracer test. Again, false.* Most of the water used in the tracer test (to ensure the safe operation of the new facility) will migrate back to the existing CCSD well field. Only about 27 acre-feet will be lost to stream underflow.
- *"The project is extremely expensive."* Compared to what? The project's estimated cost of \$8.8 million estimated construction cost is much lower than published estimates for any other alternative that would produce an adequate, reliable supply of water. A similar project off San Simeon Creek Road, outlined last year in a technical memorandum by CDM Smith, carried an estimated price tag of \$15.3 million.
- *"Cambria ratepayers will bear the burden for funding this project."* Not necessarily. The CCSD and County have applied for \$3.75 million in state grant funds. It is also misleading to imply that Cambrians would not have to foot the bill if some other alternative is chosen.
- *"The CCSD has not pursued offers from ranchers."* In a severe drought such as the current one, no one in this area has water to spare. Ranchers' offers of water do no good when their own wells are in danger of running dry.

The same goes for water rights. Writing in the July 10 edition of *The Cambrian*, Lou Blanck claims that the CCSD is ignoring the option of petitioning for expanded water rights in the Santa Rosa Creek aquifer. In fact, the CCSD has not ignored the expanded water rights option. It is in the process of applying to the State Water Resources Control Board for temporary changes in its diversion permit conditions, which govern when the wells can operate.

However, expanded rights do not ensure that the aquifer will remain full enough to use through the remainder of the dry season, particularly if the underflow of the creek stops and the upcoming rainy season is delayed, as it was last year.

This is why the CCSD has been so focused on developing a reliable back-up supply of water since early this year. We will continue doing all we can to ensure a long-term

supply from our existing sources, but the need now is for an additional supply that we can rely upon in severe droughts.

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