

WATERING DESERT - A usually dry stretch of Amargosa Creek at 25th Street West and Elizabeth Lake Road in Palmdale is being eyed as a spot to use California Aqueduct water to replenish the Antelope Valley's groundwater supplies.

GENE BRECKNER/Valley Press

City seeking help to recharge Amargosa
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PALMDALE - City officials asked Palmdale Water District to become a key partner in the design and construction of a water recharge project: Partnering means contributing money. Although the total cost for the Upper Amargosa Creek Recharge and Nature Park Project exceeds \$14 million, the amount sought from the water district has not been determined. District board members and officials agreed the project would benefit Palmdale and the Antelope Valley region overall, but the board delayed a decision.

"Overall, it's a great project," said Curtis Paxton, assistant general manager of the district. "There are a few questions that need to be answered - where the water goes once it's recharged and how soon (it reaches) the wells. Some risk analysis needs to be done."

Paxton recommended that the water board form an ad hoc committee to work jointly with Palmdale Water District staff to gather more information before making any commitment.

Aimed at helping replenish the Valley's underground water table using water from the nearby California Aqueduct, as well as providing an area for trails and a nature park, the project is proposed on 75 acres along the usually dry Amargosa Creek near 25th Street West, bordering Lake Elizabeth Road in west Palmdale.

Leon Swain, Palmdale's director of Public Works, began his presentation Wednesday night with a slide that showed extended arms shaking hands. He said he put the handshake picture in the presentation to represent "a potentially long-term partnership."

The Amargosa Creek recharge project is one of seven projects given high priority status in the Antelope Valley Integrated Regional Water Management Plan, aimed at ensuring a stable water supply for the region. The Amargosa Creek recharge project was also included on a list of seven projects submitted to the state in hopes of receiving Proposition 50 funds meant to assist communities with various water-related issues.

The district board was among the agencies that have approved the water management plan.

"Adoption of IRWMP is a huge success," Swain added. "We came up with a strategic plan to address water reliability and supply issues in the Valley, and a number of key strategies related to water supply management."

The Amargosa Creek project, he said, fits five management plan strategies:

Water supply management.

Water quality management.

Flood management.

Environmental resource management.

Land use management.

"As we're looking at trying to manage all these challenges, they're regional issues," Swain said. "One of the only ways we're going to solve our problem is to bring more water into the Antelope Valley."

The Amargosa Creek project provides water banking possibilities, a storm water recharge area, flood control, habitat restoration as well as nature parks and trails, Swain said. As a natural creek bed, Amargosa Creek has been identified as one of the Valley's best recharge areas, he said. The site is also in close proximity to the California Aqueduct.

"If we're going to bank water, what better place?" Swain said.

"The city already owns a lot of this land," Swain said. "That's a key component of the recharge. The City Council recently approved making an offer to acquire some adjacent property as well."

The project was proposed because of overdrafted groundwater in the Antelope Valley basin - too much water pumped from local wells.

In certain spots the water table dropped 200 feet within 18 years, Swain said.

"That's a real concern. It allows land subsidence," he said. In land subsidence, the earth settles, making less room for underground water storage capacity.

Swain urged the PWD board to join the city's project. "The longer it takes to get projects like this built, the more opportunity is lost. I believe this has the components that make it very economical.

"These types of solutions do cost money," he acknowledged.

He said the estimated \$14.5 million cost includes environmental reviews and engineering design

and construction. Palmdale is paying \$2.5 million from the city coffers and seeking \$3 million from Proposition 50 funds, plus vying for a \$350,000 Environmental Enhancement and Mitigation Grant from the state for highway landscaping and urban forestry projects.

That still leaves a shortfall in excess of \$8.6 million, which administrators hope to fix by forming partnerships with the Palmdale Water District, the Los Angeles County Waterworks Districts, Antelope Valley-East Kern Water District, the Antelope Valley State Water Contractors Association, Littlerock Creek Irrigation District and possibly Lancaster, or, as Swain called it, "our sister city to the north."

Palmdale Water District Board President Dick Wells gave the project his nod of approval, though no official decision has been made by the water board. "We're putting a recharge where the overdraft is greatest," Wells said.

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