

City's water system may get federal stimulus funding



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Petaluma's new \$110 million wastewater treatment plant went online in January and will be fully operational next month.

Published: Friday, May 15, 2009 at 11:05 a.m.

Last Modified: Friday, May 15, 2009 at 11:05 a.m.

Petaluma's planned system of recycled water pipelines would qualify for federal stimulus funding under a bill introduced Thursday by nine Bay Area congressmembers.

The legislation is intended to boost water recycling in the Bay Area and help stimulate the economy while reducing the demand for limited fresh water supplies.

It would make six additional Bay Area projects — including the Petaluma system — eligible for federal funding. The projects, which would save an estimated 2.6 billion gallons per year for the region's water supply, would be added to the Bay Area Regional Water Recycling Program to

help address California's cycles of drought and reduce dependence on water from the troubled Bay-Delta ecosystem.

"This is exciting news," said Councilmember David Glass. "It looks better today than yesterday the project will qualify for federal stimulus funding."

The Bay Area Regional Water Recycling Program Expansion Act of 2009 was introduced by Representatives George Miller, D-Martinez; Pete Stark, D-Fremont; Ellen Tauscher, D-Concord; Anna Eshoo, D-Palo Alto; Mike Honda, D-San Jose; Lynn Woolsey, D-Petaluma; Jerry McNerney, D-Pleasanton; and Jackie Speier, D-San Mateo.

The six projects would add enough water to meet the needs of 24,225 households. The activities authorized by the new legislation include installing new piping, storage tanks, and pump stations in order to provide clean water to the cities of Petaluma, Concord, Dublin, Redwood City, Antioch, and throughout the Palo Alto area including Stanford University.

According to the regional agencies, 3,581 jobs would be supported by the bill's enactment.

Construction of Petaluma's water recycling plant began in October 2005 and the facility went online in January of this year. The Ellis Creek plant, south of the Kaiser medical offices and adjacent to Shollenberger Park, is expected to serve Petaluma for the next 100 years by transforming sewage into a usable water supply.

Using everything from microbes to UV rays to algae-filled wetlands, the plant is designed to treat Petaluma's sewage to "tertiary" standards — safe enough to water playing fields and home landscaping.

In the winter, the city can discharge treated wastewater into the Petaluma River. In the summer, when the 262-acre plant is fully operational, it will produce recycled water to irrigate nearby farms, parks and golf courses.

A \$55 million distribution system will deliver the recycled water to new homes and businesses in town.

When it is fully operational, the plant will produce 464 million gallons of recycled water a year — enough to offset the water use of 1,400 single-family homes, according to the city.

The lawmakers released the following statement after introducing the bill:

"As people all over the country are impacted by declining water supplies, there is no better time to invest in new water technologies like water recycling. Recycling our wastewater is a smart and efficient way to conserve water supplies, lessen our impact on our natural resources, and create jobs and support local businesses.

"Expanding water recycling will allow our Bay Area communities access to a continuous water supply, even during times of drought, and will stabilize both our water resources and our local

economies. And creating new alternative water sources by using innovative water recycling technologies will allow us to take some of the enormous strain off the Bay-Delta and other natural water resources.

“With this bill, we’ll allow cities across the Bay Area to join in a strong federal-local partnership that is providing our region a sustainable and reliable clean water supply.”

Water recycling also received a large funding boost in President Obama’s American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar recently announced that \$135 million in Recovery Act funds would be dedicated exclusively for water recycling programs like those in the Bay Area.