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PRESERVING THE DELTA

Recycled-water coalition grows in size, influence

By Paul Burgarino

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New members from the Delta and Central Valley are trickling into a coalition of Bay Area public agencies looking to increase the state's water supply with recycled water.

Brentwood, Ceres, Modesto, Fresno, Turlock and Patterson's Del Puerto Water District recently joined the Western Recycled Water Coalition, boosting the group to 21 members.

Formerly called the Bay Area Recycled Water Coalition, the group started in the mid-2000s with a half-dozen members. It

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now represents about 3.2 million people.

Recycling water reduces the amount of fresh water pumped from the Delta and provides a sustainable water supply that can withstand droughts, low snowpacks and restrictions on water withdrawals, said Gary Darling, general manager of the Delta Diablo Sanitation District.

"Every drop of recycled water we produce reduces the amount of fresh water we have to draw from the Delta and our groundwater. It really is the low-hanging fruit of water development," Darling said.

Establishing a group of like-minded water utilities allows them to speak with "one voice" when lobbying for money from state and federal officials, Darling said.

"(U.S. Sen. Dianne) Feinstein told us in 2007 that we must show these projects as resolving a regional need," Darling said.

William Wong, a senior civil engineer in Modesto, said the city joined the coalition because of its clout and success in obtaining funds. Modesto, along with Turlock, Ceres, Stanislaus County and the Del Puerto Water District, is trying to create a \$100 million regional water project allowing recycled water to be used for irrigation in drought-affected areas of the San Joaquin Valley. It would also reduce the

amount of wastewater discharged into the San Joaquin River, which feeds into the Delta, Wong said.

But previous efforts to obtain federal funds for the project failed. Coalition membership, he said, "will help us better present our case."

The group also is able to collaborate.

Over the past few years, officials say, public acceptance and understanding of recycled water has increased. Or, as Wong puts it, people are getting over the "ew factor."

"It's treated to a high quality, cleaner than what comes out of the river before it's treated," Wong said.

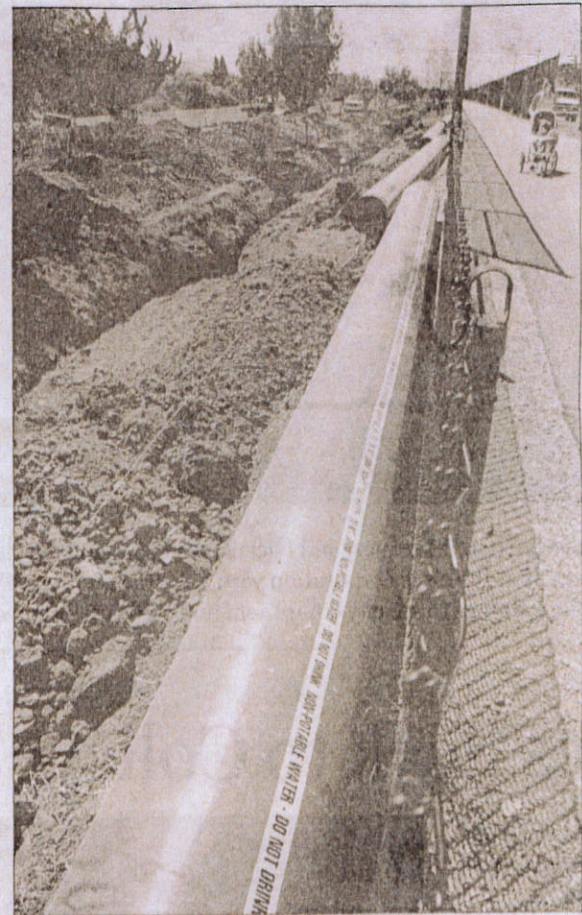
Recycled water uses in Northern California range from industrial cooling of Silicon Valley's data centers and East Contra Costa's power plants to landscaping in parks, golf courses and trails in cities throughout the East Bay.

A large recycled water program in Monterey is used for raw food crop irrigation.

Despite steep startup costs, cities are starting to see long-term savings from making the water switch.

Pittsburg has saved about \$75,000 a year on its general operating costs since turning the spigot on reused water in 2009, said Walter Pease, the city's water utilities director. It cost the city \$7 million, including \$2.5 million in redevelopment money, for the program.

Using recycled water also reduces the need for new system capacity by



SUSAN TRIPP POLLARD/STAFF ARCHIVES

A recycled water transmission pipeline was built along the Iron Horse Trail in the mid-2000s to provide irrigation users with a drought-resistant supply of water while conserving drinking water for residents of the San Ramon Valley.

about 1 million gallons a day, Pease said. Calpine's two major power plants in Pittsburg use Delta Diablo recycled water to cool their machinery.

Coalition members are planning 20 new recycled water projects over the next

few years while trying to bring in new members from Monterey and the Sierra foothill communities, as well as Oregon and Nevada.

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