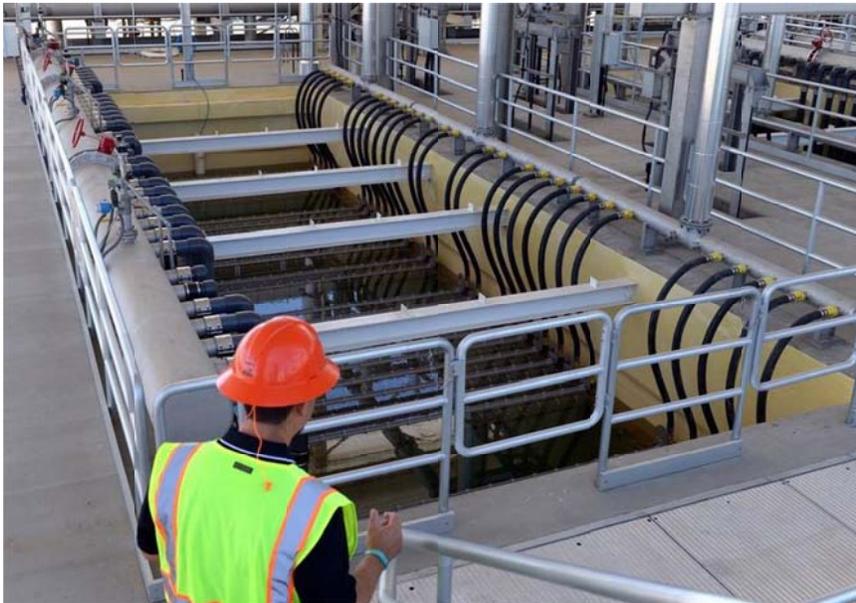


<http://www.modbee.com/news/article26623771.html>

Modesto poised to move forward on recycled-water project



The river discharge pump station at the Jennings Road treatment plant sends Modesto's treated wastewater into the San Joaquin River during the rainy season. In the new North Valley Regional Recycled Water Program, Modesto, Turlock, and the Del Puerto Water District will combine to build pipelines to send their treated wastewater to the Delta-Mendota Canal to be sold to farmers. **Joan Barnett Lee** – jlee@modbee.com



The membrane bio reactors are part of phase 2 of the Jennings Road treatment plan southwest of Modesto. Modesto is upgrading the plant to what is known as tertiary treatment. The project is expected to be completed by the end of this year. **Joan Barnett Lee** – jlee@modbee.com



The membrane bio reactors and recirculation pumps of phase 2 at the Jennings Road treatment plant southwest of Modesto are pictured on Monday. Modesto is upgrading the plant to what is known as tertiary treatment. The project is expected to be completed by the end of this year. **Joan Barnett Lee** – jlee@modbee.com



The aeration basin of phase 2 at the Jennings Road wastewater treatment plant is pictured on Monday. Modesto is upgrading the plant to what is known as tertiary treatment. The project is expected to be completed by the end of this year **Joan Barnett Lee** – jlee@modbee.com

BY KEVIN VALINE

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Modesto is poised to take a big step Tuesday in its project to send highly treated wastewater to drought-stricken West Side farmers as soon as 2018, though the Turlock Irrigation District remains a staunch opponent over concerns of how the project will affect its groundwater basin.

The City Council is expected to approve the environmental studies for the project, make findings regarding the project's environmental impacts and the steps the city will take to lessen them, approve components of the project and authorize staff to begin the process of hiring a company to design and build the project.

Modesto has partnered with Turlock and Patterson-based Del Puerto Water District on the North Valley Regional Recycled Water Program, which consists of the cities building pipelines to send their treated wastewater to the Delta-Mendota Canal. The water then would be sent to Del Puerto farmers to irrigate their cropland. In wet years, extra water would be sent to wildlife refuges.

Modesto discharges its treated wastewater into the San Joaquin River roughly from October through March at its Jennings Road treatment plant, which is northwest of Turlock and in the Turlock Irrigation District's boundaries.

Turlock had discharged its wastewater into the TID's Harding Drain, which empties into the San Joaquin River, though the TID and landowners had taken water from the drain to irrigate farmland. Turlock stopped discharging into the drain about a year ago and now sends its wastewater to the river through a pipeline.

Modesto Utilities Director Larry Parlin said the TID could sue over the environmental studies to stop the project. The TID is represented by the Sacramento-based law firm Remy Moose Manley. The law firm states in a letter to Modesto that the studies are inadequate and asks Modesto to revise them.

TID analyst Herb Smart said a lawsuit always is a possibility with an environmental review. He said while the TID strongly supports projects that reuse water, it has concerns about this one because it sends water from its basin to another one. He said that puts additional stress on the groundwater in the district's boundaries and on the Tuolumne River water the TID sends to farmers.

He said the wastewater Turlock discharges into the San Joaquin River and may send to Del Puerto could be used to help Turlock's subbasin. "Moving forward," he said, "that's why we are trying to get access to that recycled water. ... Why not keep it here to make the subbasin more sustainable?"

Parlin said if Modesto is sued over the project, it could ask the state to intervene and allow the project to continue. He said state officials are eager to see this project become a reality because of the drought.

The TID is not the only one with concerns. A Modesto report states Turlock "has not decided whether to proceed with its components of the NVRWP."

Turlock City Manager Roy Wasden said his city is committed to the project but needs to make sure it has its relationships in place for this project as well as a Stanislaus Regional Water Authority project. The authority – which is composed of Modesto, Turlock and Ceres – is in talks with the TID to have the irrigation district supply the cities with drinking water.

Smart said the project makes sense if the authority provides the TID with some of the treated wastewater. He said it's critical that the TID protect its farmers if it provides the cities with drinking water.

Parlin said Modesto is prepared to move forward on the project to send water to West Side farmers if Turlock pulls out. He disagreed with the TID's assessment of the environmental studies and said the wastewater processed at Modesto's Jennings Road plant comes from Modesto's basin.

He estimated the project's cost for Modesto at \$50 million. He said Modesto plans to borrow the money from the state at 1 percent interest. He said Modesto would recoup its costs through what it charges Del Puerto for the water. He added those charges would include revenue for Modesto.

He declined to say how much Del Puerto would pay. He said the price would be released once construction starts. A Modesto Bee story in February reported Turlock and Modesto were negotiating a price of about \$200 an acre-foot for the recycled water.

The Jennings Road plant produces about 20,000 acre-feet of treated wastewater annually. Parlin said once the pipeline is built, Modesto initially would send 16,500 acre-feet to Del Puerto. Modesto would use the rest to irrigate its 2,500-acre ranch near the treatment plant.

Modesto is doing this project in conjunction with a state requirement that it upgrade its Jennings Road plant to what is known as tertiary treatment. He said that project will cost \$130 million and is being paid for by the city's wastewater customers. Work started in 2012 and is expected to be completed by the end of this year.

The council meets at 5:30 p.m. in the basement chambers of Tenth Street Place, 1010 10th St.

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