

Recycled water on way to growers

Ground broken on innovative project



Groundbreaking

Ground was broken Friday on the North Valley Regional Recycled Water Program, which will deliver treated wastewater from the cities of Modesto, Ceres and Turlock, to the parched Del Puerto Water District which runs along the I-5 corridor from Vernalis to Santa Nella.

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New water is on the way to parched fields and orchards in a West Side water district which has seen its annual allocation of surface water eliminated in recent years.

Ground was broken Friday on an innovative program which will recycle treated wastewater from Modesto, Turlock and Ceres for use by growers in the Del Puerto Water District, a narrow federal water district which stretches along the Interstate 5 corridor from Vernalis to Santa Nella.

A host of local leaders, Del Puerto farmers and dignitaries gathered on the banks of the Delta-Mendota Canal north of Patterson for the ground-breaking ceremony on the pipeline segment which represents the first phase of the program.

By the end of 2017, recycled water will begin flowing into the canal at that point, where it can be directly used by growers or stored in San Luis Reservoir.

Anthea Hansen, general manager of the Del Puerto Water District, said the program will provide a reliable water supply on which growers can depend to meet at least a portion of their needs.

The district has been hard hit in recent years by both the persistent drought and environmental regulations which have limited deliveries of surface water to users south of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

The district was allocated no surface water in 2014 and 2015. This year, Del Puerto received a 5 percent allocation but even that meager amount has not yet been delivered and may not be, said Jim Jasper, a Newman almond grower and Del Puerto board member.

To understand the hardships the district's growers have faced in recent years "is to understand how meaningful this program will be for our future," Hansen told those gathered for the ground-breaking.

“This partnership will support ag investments, jobs and economic activity on the West Side,” she stated. “As the program grows, it is possible that over one-third of the district’s post-conservation needs could be delivered from the pipeline which we are about to build. Water generated will be a reliable base supply on which each grower will be able to depend year in and year out over the course of more than 40 years.”

The first phase will include a pipeline which allows the delivery of water treated at the city of Modesto plant on Jennings Road; a subsequent phase will allow delivery of recycled water from the Turlock plant. Each of those plants also treats a portion of wastewater from Ceres. As those cities grow, so will the volume of recycled water. The environment benefits as well.

David Murillo, director of the Bureau of Reclamation’s Mid-Pacific Region, said that the project will ultimately deliver 59,000 acre-feet of water a year, of which 43,000 will go to agriculture and 16,000 will help support wildlife refuges.

“The best thing about it is that you get to control it,” he told those in attendance at the ground-breaking. “It is a reliable source.”

Jasper said that initially, he believes the program will bring about 20,000 acre-feet of water annually for ag use in the district.

“We discovered some water that really was not being used beneficially,” he said of the treated wastewater. “We can utilize something that nobody else is using. This is the first time we have seen light at the end of the tunnel in terms of getting some water. We have worked on this for a long, long time, and it looks like it is going to come to fruition.”

Several speakers applauded the innovative nature of the program and the collaboration among agencies needed to make it a reality.

“I think it is a model for the kind of water projects we will see more of in the future,” said Congressman Jim Costa. “We can make this water work in ways that we have only dreamed about.”

Lyndel Melton of RMC Water & Environment, an environmental engineering firm focused on water, said the project represents “the first time ever that we have put recycled water into a federal facility of this nature. It is a huge accomplishment.”

Technically known as the North Valley Regional Recycled Water Program, the project is a partnership which includes Del Puerto, Stanislaus County and the cities of Modesto, Turlock and Ceres. That partnership worked with a number of regulatory agencies at the state and federal levels to bring the project to fruition.

The project works to the advantage of all partners, several speakers said, as it creates a beneficial use for the treated wastewater of the three cities while producing a critically-needed supply for the West Side growers.

“It is proof that things can be done to make the situation better no matter how difficult the task,” Hansen said of the program. “If you leave with anything today,” she said in closing, “please let it be knowledge that there is always a possibility for positive change in an ever-changing world as long as you believe that your reservoir is half-full, not half-empty.”

http://www.westsideconnect.com/news/local_news/recycled-water-on-way-to-growers/article_8045c9b2-706a-11e6-8c10-4342691d5986.html