Plan would reserve water for summer use

HEMET: *City Council considers how to get MWD to make good on recreation promises.*

By CHARLES HAND
THE VALLEY CHRONICLE

Members of the Hemet City Council hope to leverage a plan to store recycled water adjacent to Diamond Valley Lake into some recreational opportunities that will draw tourists.

Behrooz Mortazavi, assistant general manager of Eastern Municipal Water District, this week reviewed with the council a plan to pump treated wastewater into a depression just south of Valley-Wide Recreation & Park District's water park at the northeast entrance to the reservoir.

Mortazavi said demand for the recycled water is so low in winter that the district has to dump it into the ocean.

Recycled water can be used only for certain types of irrigation. None can be used in homes except those with dual water systems that route the recycled water to such uses as flushing toilets.

Water stored in the proposed pond would be withdrawn during the summer when demand for irrigation water among agricultural users increases dramatically, Mortazavi told the council.

Several members of the council said this could be a good time to approach Metropolitan Water District, Eastern's parent organization and owner of Diamond Valley Lake, to fulfill promises it made at the time the reservoir was built to provide water-based recreational facilities.

The land on which Metropolitan proposed to build a water park has since been withdrawn and the agency has indicated it wants to build a housing development on the plot instead.

Mortazavi said the 90-acre

▸ SEE WATER ON 4

WATER

■ Continued from PAGE 3

pond of recycled lake could not be used for recreation, but an adjacent 30-acre pond of potable water could be used for boating and fishing.

It could not, however, be used for any sport involving body contact, including water skiing.

The pond of recycled water is part of a two-year test in which Eastern would evaluate the costs and methods to determine whether the concept is viable.

After the two years, the pond would be shut down.

Councilwoman Robin Lowe said she would like to see the recreational lake expanded beyond the 30 acres envisioned by Eastern, but Mortazavi said the pond would be virtually empty during the summer swimming season anyway since it would remain part of the water system.

Mayor Eric McBride said he would also like to see the recreational element expanded.

"I see it as far less than we were promised. It is like promising a Cadillac and selling you a Yugo," he said.

Councilmen Jim Foreman and Jerry Franchville expressed similar sentiments. "They owe us," said Franchville.

"I'm looking at the benefits to groundwater," Mortazavi said.

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EDITORIAL

Right fight, wrong battle

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Let's be clear up front that Hemet has never received the recreational companions to Diamond Valley Lake promised a decade and a half ago by Metropolitan Water District during its years-long campaign to win local support for the idea of establishing a huge reservoir on former farming land.

That is not in dispute, and MWD still owes Hemet opportunities for water-based recreation that it promised.

That said, the Hemet City Council's attitude about a proposal over recycled water was misguided.

Behrooz Mortazavi — assistant general manager of Eastern Municipal Water District, a division of MWD — presented the City Council with a plan to increase the recycled water the region can keep during winters, when demand is low, for the summers, when demand rises dramatically.

The plan is a worthy one, particularly at a time when water scarcity is an increasing issue. Whether it works out logistically remains to be seen, but the concept is solid.

It is solid enough that the several members of the council should have tamped down on the desire to hold the plan hostage in an attempt to force MWD to fulfill its long overdue promises.

Of particularly questionable usefulness is the contention by a couple of council members and the city attorney to determine whether water skiing can be mixed with potable water destined for the pipes serving homes and businesses.

The standard throughout the water industry — a standard that has applied to Diamond Valley Lake since it was established — is that body contact is not allowed in water destined for drinking.

It's not just because of the ewwwww! factor of thinking about people using the water that goes straight into regular service as a toilet.

Those icky possibilities also create the possibility, along with general body contact with the water, of introducing into the water system bacteria that will almost surely not be caught before it is distributed.

The simple truth is that there is no such thing as water skiing without body contact.

At the other end of the system are families counting on the water districts — including Hemet's — to provide them water without disease.

Beyond that, the idea of holding a good idea hostage because of pique — as justified as it may be — over MWD's failure to fulfill its promises is not the best way to represent the residents of the community.

Getting MWD to fulfill its promises is a worthwhile endeavor, but forcing EMWD to dump usable water into drainage canals that will carry it to the ocean and away from Valley users is not the way to pursue it.