

North County supply of recycled water to more than double
By: DAVID STERRETT

SAN MARCOS ---- Instead of watching the water from local faucets and sprinklers go down the drain, the Vallecitos Water District is planning to turn more of its waste water into a reusable supply for landscaping.

The water district, which serves more than 76,000 residents from the western edge of Escondido to the eastern end of Carlsbad, expects to more than double its production of reclaimed water with money from a \$66.7 million bond, General Manager Bill Rucker said Monday.

The bond will go before the district board of directors for approval at their June 15 meeting, and Rucker said he expects the board to approve the bond because they have been working on it for more than year.

Rucker said about \$42 million of the bond will pay for two underground water storage tanks in Twin Oaks Valley, and \$24.7 million will fund the expansion of the Meadowlark Water Reclamation Facility on the southeastern edge of Carlsbad.

He said the production of water suitable to use on parks, golf courses and landscaped areas will increase from about 2 million gallons a day to about 4.5 million gallons a day when expansion is completed in 2007.

"The future is all about resource management and reclaimed water is part of the scheme," said board member Darrell Gentry. "Anything we can do to reduce the use of importable water for irrigation and free up the supply for household and business consumption is a real positive."

About 90 percent of the water in San Diego County is either pumped 250 miles from the Colorado River or pumped more than 500 miles from Northern California, Rucker said. The reused water is one way to generate more locally controlled water as are plans for desalination.

Rucker said the additional 2.5 million gallons a day of reused water will offset the annual water needs of about 5,630 single-family homes in the district.

"Their recycled water will reduce demand for imported water and will be helpful to the entire region," said Bill Jacoby, the water resources manager for the San Diego County Water Authority. "We encourage member agencies to pursue recycled water because it's a drought-proof supply of water and it's environmentally the right thing to do ---- to use water again instead of just treating it and sending it out to the ocean."

The Vallecitos district will send all the reused water to the City of Carlsbad and the Olivenhain Municipal Water District because it would cost too much to pump the water back to its own customers, Rucker said. He said the money from selling the water will be used to offset the cost of treating the sewage and converting it to a usable source.

Carlsbad buys the 2 million gallons of water now produced at the plant and has signed an agreement to purchase up to 3 million gallons a day when the facility is expanded, said Bill Plummer, Carlsbad's deputy city engineer.

He said Carlsbad has about 200 sites using reclaimed water including the Aviara and La Costa golf courses, Legoland California, Poinsettia Park and several elementary schools.

"Reusable water improves the reliability of the water supply," said Plummer, who added Carlsbad will open a water reclamation facility in the southwest part of the city in July that will provide 4 million gallons a day.

Plummer and other water officials said reclaimed water is not used more frequently because it requires a completely different set of pipes, which are expensive.

The Olivenhain Municipal Water District is in the process of installing such pipes along Rancho Santa Fe Road near the Vallecitos reclamation facility because it will buy about 1.5 million gallons a day after the expansion, said Olivenhain general manager David McCollom.

"More than half the water we use every day goes to keeping yards green," said McCollom, whose district serves 55,000 people from San Marcos to the city of San Diego. "There is no reason to use perfectly good drinkable water on irrigation when something else will do just as well."

McCollom said reclaimed water is not at all a danger to residents' health, and said "you could actually swim in the water."

The water is as clear as drinking water after all the treatment, and the plant will be even more efficient with the expansion, said Rucker.

Rucker said he hopes to award a construction contract for the expansion in July and for work to begin before the end of the summer. He said the district has been working on securing the bond for more than a year.

The 30-year bond will have a variable interest rate, but the district will have the ability to lock into a fixed rate if necessary, Rucker said. He said existing customers will not pay for the bond, and it will be repaid with revenue generated from fees required to connect or expand sewage and water services.