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News

SGPWA to get state grant for Cabazon well

By Timothy Smith
Record Gazette

The San Gorgonio Pass Water Agency (SGPWA) General Manager Jeff Davis sent an email to the Cabazon Water District (CWD) General Manager Calvin Louie back in January. Louie said the email was vague and led to a meeting between the agencies in July.

The July meeting included Louie, the Cabazon Water District engineer and Davis. A misunderstanding arose from the meeting in regards to the CWD ability to meet its local demand for water.

The CWD has enough water at this time and doesn't need another agency to drill a well for them, Louie and CWD Board President R.D. Cash agree.

Louie saves the district money, about \$5,000 a month according to Cash, by pumping water only at night, during off-peak hours. Electricity is cheaper at that time and saves the 1,050 district ratepayers money.

Louie said he pumps enough water each night from two wells to keep two one-million gallon tanks and one half-million gallon tank 50 percent full. Those amounts are enough for the Cabazon homeowners and any fire emergency that may impact the area, Louie said.

Louie called the whole matter a "misunderstanding." When Louie described how he maintains the district water supply, it wasn't a call for help. It was simply a description of the day-to-day operation of the effective CWD operation.

By keeping the CWD tanks at the 50 percent levels it saves on pumping charges for its customers and everyone has enough water, even in an emergency.

In November the SGPWA applied for a state grant to drill a water well in the Cabazon Basin because it was felt CWD needed help with its water supply.

A state grant provides about 75 percent of a well and tank, Louie said. It runs about \$1 million for a new well and tank. The SGPWA applied for a state grant that the CWD was unaware of and put the agency in line to receive state funding for the project.



CABAZON WATERMEN - Water District Board President R. D. Cash and General Manager Calvin Louie. Photograph for the Record Gazette by Timothy Smith

from the hours of 8 to
12 p.m.

Schools

Winter Wish makes
holidays special for
Beaumont families By
Timothy Smith

Crafton Hills College
allowing

Davis estimated the project at \$1.5 million to complete. A \$20,000 study is underway by SGPWA to determine the actual cost before implementing the project. The study was estimated to take 45-60 days to complete.

Louie and Cash visited a SGPWA Dec. 3 board meeting and asked that the state grant be turned over to CWD. They also noted that they don't wish SGPWA to drill a well in the Cabazon Basin.

In a Nov. 27 letter to SGPWA President John Jeter, Cash said, "We understand that the Agency has a long term goal of extending the East Branch Extension to the Cabazon Service Area and we certainly support that vision. At this time, the District is opposed to the Agency constructing any groundwater extraction wells within the Cabazon Basin."

The grant transfer was denied by the state Office of Emergency Services. The SGPWA board voted to move forward with the plan 6-1. Board Treasurer Jim Andersen was the lone no vote.

While the CWD said it wants to cooperate with SGPWA, they don't want the well drilled because of the many pronged issues it will bring up.

To study a well project and to actually drill a well are two different things, Cash said. If a well is drilled by SGPWA in Cabazon, Cash doesn't feel that is working cooperatively.

In a memorandum to the SGPWA board of directors, Davis cited several reasons for the move, including gaining a presence in the Cabazon Basin, to serve wholesale water from the basin to Cabazon customers and potentially other customers. The other customers include the Cabazon Outlet Mall, the Morongo Indian Reservation, the city of Banning, the Hi Valleys Water District and possibly the Metropolitan Water District (MWD). The project would start small with one well, then a tank and possibly another well down the road the memorandum said.

The project would add to the SGPWA revenue stream by offering customers groundwater and standby water. The agency could also charge customers an annual fee just to hook up to the SGPWA system, whether they buy water or not.

Cabazon residents have already been paying for the SGPWA operation for 45 years with no direct benefit. The SGPWA operation only goes as far east as Beaumont and Cherry Valley. The plan appears to continue that practice. Banning is in the same position as Cabazon by funding the state water operation with no direct benefit from the state water agency.

Banning is currently working with SGPWA to extend the State Water Project (SWP) pipeline to the city. Next in line for a SWP extension will be Cabazon and maybe even the Coachella Valley in the future.

Other reasoning for SGPWA to continue with the Cabazon project include an added revenue stream that would grow over time, more menu items to serve customers and the most dubious claim of conjunctive or emergency use with the MWD.

In the memorandum to the SGPWA board, Davis said that it could put water into the Colorado River Aqueduct in an emergency situation. Also, the well could provide Metropolitan with an opportunity to withdraw stored Colorado River water from the Cabazon Basin.

Cash and Louie pointed out that there is no connection in Cabazon to the Colorado River Aqueduct that passes through the rural community on its way to Lake Matthews. Cash said, "No Colorado River water is stored in the Cabazon Basin."

MWD Press Officer Bob Muir said on Wednesday that the MWD has no water connections with the SGPWA or the CWD at this time, in the Pass area.

One improvement Louie would like to see in the CWD are connections between the Morongo Casino, Cabazon Mall and the district so the entities can back each other up and remain self-sufficient.

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