

March 11, 2009

#7

To:  
The Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors  
105 East Anapamu Street, Room 407  
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

For: Agenda Item #7, March 17, 2009  
Consider Recommendations Re: 2009-2010 Annual Work Program

Re: Public Water Resources in Cuyama Valley, Santa Barbara County

Dear Members of the Board,

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

As you know, the Cuyama Groundwater Basin is the most critically over-drafted basin in Santa Barbara County and serves as the sole water source for all residents and landowners in Cuyama Valley. We have no long-range plan for water management or basin recharge in the Valley. Santa Barbara County must implement a long-range management and conservation plan for the Cuyama Groundwater Basin. As stakeholders and custodians of public resources in the Cuyama Valley, the Counties of San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Ventura, and Kern must all actively participate in water management and conservation practices.

According to Santa Barbara County Water Agency data (SBCWA 1996; SBCWA 2001) water quality in the Cuyama Groundwater Basin has been deteriorating due to "constant cycling and evaporation of irrigation water in the basin". The Department of Water Resources (DWR 1998) states "hydrographs show that groundwater levels have dropped about 150 feet in the west-central part of the basin and more than 300 feet in the northeastern part of the basin in the last 40 to 50 years".

The Cuyama Groundwater Basin is complex and water levels vary dramatically in different areas of the Valley. Groundwater levels in the southern Cuyama Valley, near Ventucopa, stand between 100 feet and 45 feet, or less, below land surface. North of Ventucopa, and in the central basin, groundwater levels drop to between 450 and 625 feet below the surface.

In 2005, Diamond Rock Sand and Gravel Mine requested a Conditional Use Permit to extract aggregate from the southern Cuyama River, just north of Ventucopa. Federal, California, and County permits are required in order to remove sand and gravel from the Cuyama River, an American Waterway, and public trust resource. The proposed mine excavation would cross the riverbed at a depth of 90 feet or more. Diamond Rock Mine is requesting a 30-year permit. If the Mine is permitted our

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groundwater and aquifer will be exposed. The Diamond Rock Mine project is currently involved in litigation under CEQA, the California Environmental Quality Act and is in the process of obtaining operating permits from the United States Army Corps of Engineers.

In January 2007, GPS Mine dug a new, un-permitted pit, immediately north of the proposed Diamond Rock Mine site, extracted aggregate sand and gravel, and exposed the groundwater. The Federal Environmental Protection Agency has temporarily prohibited GPS from extracting any additional aggregate from the pit. GPS Mine, like Diamond Rock, has not completed the reporting, review, and permitting processes required to extract sand and gravel from the Cuyama Riverbed.

In the riverbed, at the proposed Diamond Rock Mine site, an underground rock wall formation retains the groundwater in the southern and upstream part of the aquifer. Groundwater levels upstream and south of the GPS and Diamond Rock Mine sites are 300 to 500 higher than groundwater levels north and downstream. The naturally occurring rock formation is part of an earthquake fault line that runs through the riverbed and can be seen from State Highway 33. If the rock wall and fault formation are damaged by mining operations in this section of the Cuyama River, all of the local groundwater could be lost.

In 2008, Fifth District Supervisor, Joseph Centeno, the County of Santa Barbara, and the US Geological Survey initiated the Cuyama Groundwater Basin Study. The Study is scheduled for completion in 2012. Please be advised that, recently, several of Cuyama Valley's largest agricultural businesses and landowners have removed their wells from the Groundwater Study database. They may feel it is not in their best economic interest to contribute to the Study, and that they do not need to participate because they have access to groundwater data from their own, independent studies. When the Groundwater Study is completed in 2012, the landowners, who in effect are seeking to sabotage the analysis by refusing to participate, should not have legal standing to claim the Study is inconclusive due to insufficient data.

A formal request has been made for copies from the County's files of all correspondence, which includes letters, emails, and notes of telephone conversations, submitted by businesses or landowners or their agents, which limit or deny access to property and wells that were to be used to gather data for the Cuyama Groundwater Basin Study. Cuyama Valley groundwater is part of the public trust and belongs to everyone, not just to few large landowners. Santa Barbara County Water Agency and the Santa Barbara County Department of Long Range Planning must insure that the Cuyama Groundwater Basin Study is accurate and comprehensive and that the water rights of all residents and inhabitants of the Cuyama Valley are protected.

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Sustainable future plans for use of Cuyama Valley's public trust assets water and air, in particular, must begin today. Please move the proposed Rural Region Plan for Cuyama Valley forward in the Santa Barbara County Annual Work Program so we may begin work on the Cuyama Valley Long Range Plan in the current fiscal year. In addition, please be certain that the Cuyama Groundwater Basin is accepted as a component of the California Integrated Regional Water Management Program.

The Groundwater Study is needed to plan a sustainable future for Cuyama Valley. We must protect water, held in the public trust, from pollution and misuse and insure a viable future for the Valley's agriculture. Drought and the demands of increased population have put the Cuyama Valley aquifer at risk. The Groundwater Basin will run dry if water management and conservation practices are not implemented immediately.

Data gathered by the Cuyama Groundwater Basin Study will enable us to write and implement a groundwater basin management and conservation plan before the valuable watershed is gone. Please do not allow large local landowners, and agricultural or aggregate extraction businesses to degrade and destroy the natural infrastructure of the public water resources in Cuyama Valley.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Lee, CPA



Secretary of "Cuyama Valley Planning and Advisory Committee",  
Member of "Save Cuyama Valley",  
Resident of Santa Barbara County for 34 years,  
Pistachio Farmer, and Resident of Cuyama Valley

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# Cuyama Valley Planning & Advisory Committee

(Agenda Item #7, March 17, 2009, Recommendations for 2009-2010 Annual Work Program)

The items listed below were submitted by and agreed to by all in attendance at the March 10, 2009 meeting of the CVPAC to be submitted to the Santa Barbara Long-Range Planning Department for inclusion into the proposed Rural Region Plan for the Cuyama Valley.

## EASE RULES & REGULATIONS

Streamline and simplify the Planning Development permit process.

Do not piecemeal the planning process, provide complete and comprehensive list of what is needed from start to completion of acquiring all needed permits for an individual project.

Re-zone for easier business and community development.

Return money paid for permits denied.

*The success of the following ideas and suggestions rely on this one item.*

## RESTORE NEW CUYAMA RECREATION HALL

### ATTRACT BUSINESS

Farmers Market

Campground with hookups

Golf course

Upgrade airport

Business Park

Horse leasing and boarding

### TOURISM PLAN

Escape the smog of the inland valleys and the fog of the coast.

Sunshine 300+ days a year

Explore the Los Padres and Carrizo Planes

### TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Digital, fibre optics, high speed wireless, cell towers

### ALTERNATIVE ENERGY

Wind, solar, geothermal, natural gas, hydrogen

### LOW INCOME HOUSING

Proportional to other rural regions in the county

### SMALLER ACREAGE PARCELS

10, 20, 40 acre parcels

Allow for ranchette type development

### VILLAGES

Develop in-fill of existing villages (New Cuyama, Old Cuyama, Ventucopa, Wasioja)

High density community living following the SBCo Strategic Scan Village concept

### TRANSPORT SYSTEMS

Connect villages (dedicated travel-ways using fuel efficient vehicles and/or monorail system)

### RURAL PRESERVATION

Villages to have strict growth boundaries

Incentives for small farming