

NCSD opposes board's funding plan

By Mike Hodgson/Associate Editor

A proposal to spend \$7 million of Guadalupe oil-spill-mitigation funds on a Low Impact Development Institute, and to boost a local water-monitoring fund, is opposed by the Nipomo Community Services District.

Instead, directors would like to see some of the money spent on a district project to upgrade the Southland Wastewater Treatment Plant.

Directors voted unanimously last week to send a letter to the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board opposing the board's proposal and recommending funds be allocated for the treatment-plant upgrade.

The money would come from about \$12 million remaining in a \$20-million fund that grew out of fines assessed against Unocal for long-term leaks of diluent in the Guadalupe Oil Field in the dunes.

In addition to cleaning up the diluent, which is used to thin heavy crude oil to make it easier to pump, Unocal had to pay about \$45 million that was split up among various agencies as mitigation for the damage.

Now, the Regional Water Quality Control Board is proposing to spend \$2 million to establish the Central Coast Low Impact Development Institute and \$5 million to augment the Central Coast Ambient Monitoring Program.

Under the water board's plan, the institute, likely developed in association with a university such as Cal Poly, would encourage sustainable development throughout the region.

The increase in funding for the monitoring program would improve the board's ability to monitor local watersheds, prioritize problems and measure the board's ability to solve them, according to the proposal.

NCSD Director Larry Vierheilig called the water board's proposal "solely motherhood" that has no specifics and virtually excludes the rest of the community in determining how the money is spent.

"I'm absolutely against what they're proposing here," Vierheilig said, noting much of the data the water board wants to obtain from the monitoring program is available at low cost from the U.S. Geological Service.

"It doesn't require \$5 million," he said.

Board President Mike Winn agreed, noting the mitigation fees should be spent on projects that would have an impact on the areas where the damage occurred.

"Two million dollars dropped into Cal Poly would not produce a (Low Impact Development) Center except on paper - there would be no building, no staff," Winn said.

Director Ed Eby added that the funding should go to a project with a connection to the Guadalupe

Dunes, which is within the Nipomo Creek watershed.

“I think the (Low Impact Development) thing they propose is a sham,” Eby said. “I fully object to funds going to the (center).”

Directors agreed there is a clear nexus between the district's wastewater treatment plant and the quality of water that flows from the Nipomo Creek watershed into the dunes, and that some of the mitigation funds should be used to assist the facility upgrade.

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