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Aug. 29, 2003 -- Water Agency predicts shortage

By NOEL STACK Staff writer

El Dorado County will not have enough water to sustain the anticipated coming growth, if something doesn't change. That stark prediction, made by Bill Hetland with the El Dorado County Water Agency, sobered the Wednesday evening meeting of the Local Area Formation Commission.

"It can't be business as usual," said Hetland. "We've got to look at other options and alternatives."

In the draft water resources development plan, the Water Agency predicts that even if all of the proposed projects by water purveyors in the county were completed, the county would still come up short except in the Tahoe Basin.

"They have enough water to meet all their demands," said Hetland.

However, unless the county does not adopt a General Plan and accepts the "No Project" alternative, the West Slope will need new sources and more storage for water, he warned.

By 2025, if the county adopts the 1996 General Plan alternative, El Dorado Irrigation District will need to complete its re-diversion project and Project 184 to keep up with demands. By 2030, more storage and the Alder reservoir need to be on-line, states the plan.

The Water Agency also predicts that under the 1996 General Plan nearly 128,000 acre-feet of water will be needed to sustain build-out and agriculture but EID would be able to provide only 95,000 acre-feet even with the proposed Texas Hill Reservoir and Alder Reservoir on-line.

"You still don't have enough," said Hetland. "Water is still going to be a critical issue in the future."

Even if certain districts do find they have enough water, commented Supervisor and LAFCO Commissioner Charlie Paine, District 4, water scarcity affects every resident of the county.

"It's really a countywide problem," said Paine. "The Water Agency needs to take



a proactive approach."

Hetland said the agency would not be taking the back seat on this issue and fully intended to work with EID and other water purveyors in the county to find a solution.

"We've got to work together," he said.

Commissioners, who had just received a presentation from the county Farm Bureau, questioned Hetland about how the diminishing water supply would affect agriculture. To that, Hetland said it will be a tough road because the agency analyzed the water needs based on agricultural build-out but not on lands that could be converted to agriculture under a zoning change.

"Other areas would be put into agriculture if there is enough water," Hetland explained. "Agriculture is a huge piece of this."

Those estimated needs will be included in the final plan, he added, and will likely double. The Georgetown Divide Public Utility District would be particularly affected by an expansion of agriculture.

Under the 1996 General Plan alternative, over 32,900 acre-feet of water would be needed at build-out, including maximum agriculture, but the district only yields 16,000 acre-feet. That estimate also depends on the idea that additional projects in either Folsom North or Rubicon are completed.

"Georgetown is even in a greater fix," said Hetland, adding that the need all depends on agriculture. "If they don't do a lot of agriculture, they're in pretty good shape."

At this time the Water Agency is not making any recommendation or conclusions, according to Hetland, because it wants to wait to give the public adequate time for comment. Any comments or suggestions on the draft plan will be accepted, he added, up until the time a new General Plan is adopted by the county. After that, the Water Agency will complete its final plan in accordance with guidelines within the General Plan.

E-mail Noel Stack at nstack@mtdemocrat.net

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