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My turn: Why should we pay for their pumped water

By Richard Akin | If one of our new neighbors built a home up on top of one of these mountains, should they reasonably expect the rest of us to carry their water up there for them Of course not. But apparently those members of the El Dorado Irrigation District Board of Directors think so since at their meeting on Jan. 26 they voted to revise the retail customer rate structure so as to merge the gravity and pumped rates. Bottom line, those being served water that is pumped to their homes will see major reductions in their bills and those of us being served water delivered by Mother Nature's gravity will pay more. | March 10, 2009 15:01



Richard Akin

The current rate structure with gravity/pumped differential does not in fact substantially now recover the cost of pumping. Down at El Dorado Hills where water service is almost exclusively by pumping, there was for 2008 a PG&E bill of approximately \$612,729 to pump 6,882 acre-feet from Folsom Reservoir averaging 400 feet elevation to the El Dorado Hills Treatment Plant at elevation 750 feet. Elementary arithmetic gives us \$89 per acre-foot or 20.4 cents per CCF (100 cubic feet). The current rate, however, recovers only 9.4 cents per CCF of the pumped differential.

The story, however, does not end there because most of that water is then pumped up to the Oak Ridge tanks at elevation 960 feet. From there, other pumps at Oak Ridge force it up to even higher elevation customers on up the line. All I have touched on so far is the electric energy required. Perhaps no one can with any degree of accuracy quantify the cost of routine maintenance and major expenditures of motor and pump overhauls and all those EID pick-ups running around tinkering, adjusting and lubricating, etc.

This proposition of abolishing the pumped rate so all of us can share the cost burden carries with it surreptitious groundwork for future, very expensive operations. We all know engineers by nature love to build things; the bigger, more elaborate, the better. In recent years one hears at EID threatening noises about pumping water all the way from Folsom Lake (elevation 400 feet) up to the Bass Lake Tanks (elevation 1,470 feet). Since a "rule of thumb" for pumping works out to \$25 per

acre-foot for each 100 foot lift, it computes surely to \$250 per acre-foot or more energy cost for operation of that project. This expense is nearly prohibitive unless, of course, the entire water district shares the burden.

Earlier I presented the position that those paying current pumped rates don't begin to pay the full "tab" for this service. This applies as well to upper Pollock Pines, Strawberry and Outingdale as well as El Dorado Hills. Again, those on gravity subsidize the pumping. Nowhere does this raise its ugly head higher than the city of Placerville. While their "wholesale rate" is not currently being considered, Placerville has for years been getting ripped off big time by EID. The current rate of 42.2 cents per CCF, which equates to \$183 per acre-foot, is far higher than fair.

Placerville is served water from Reservoir No. 1, Project 184, or water from Sly Park's Jenkinson Lake. Neither source could possibly exceed a raw water value of \$40 per acre-foot. Cost to treat that water from EID internal documentation is another \$40, totaling \$80. Delivery is by Camino Conduit and El Dorado Main No. 1 by gravity at zero operational cost. Again EID is charging \$183.82. The hungry bureaucracy must be fed. Someone has to pay EID directors' health club memberships.

We all recently received a notification of public hearing on this proposed revision of the rate structure. Nowhere in that document is it mentioned that the intention is to abolish the pumped charges. This does not appear to be an innocent oversight, but rather an act of strategic deceit. How this EID Board of Directors can so egregiously betray economic justice for the core of this proud, old community is a disgusting tragedy and disappointment. This cloud of plunder and exploitation that is about to envelop us here in the middle of El Dorado County will happen, however, unless a good many recognize the threat, rise to the occasion, voice our concerns loud and clear, and very soon. Remember March 23. That is the date of a public hearing to consider this matter of pumped gravity rates. Be prepared to present your views to the directors, and hopefully the right and just conclusion will come about.

Richard Akin is a longtime resident of El Dorado County and a former member of the Board of Directors of the El Dorado Irrigation District.

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