

Supervisors drag water decision

Denise Madrid, Porterville Recorder, 12-16-10

A vote to amend the Surface Mining and Reclamation Act (SMARA) that could potentially simplify the process for water management basin construction was postponed by the Board of Supervisors Tuesday.

Many water management basins in Tulare County, such as a dam holding pond or water retention basin, have been created to meet certain water management goals and objectives for their respective jurisdictions.

These projects are subject to the provisions of the SMARA, making them prone to a “lengthy and costly review and permitting process,” according to a staff report.

SMARA, enacted by the state Legislature in 1945, was intended to address the need for a continuing supply of mineral resources. It was also passed to prevent or minimize the negative impacts of surface mining to public health, property and the environment, according to the California Department of Conservation.

There are certain instances, the report states, when the scope and nature of a public basin project may not need the level of SMARA review and permitting that is presently required, hence the need to amend the statute. According Tom Barcellos, chair for the Tulare County Farm Bureau, if adopted by the Board, the ordinance amendment would improve the County’s chances of receiving the state Department of Conservation’s approval.

“There is no doubt in my mind that the future is in recharge and the most cost-effective way to recharge our water is with recharge basins,” Third District Supervisor Phil Cox said. “I think this is trying to strike a balance and I think you’ve done so. And let’s remember, ordinances are not etched in stone.”

Still, First District Supervisor Alan Ishida suggested to delay the decision.

“I would move we put this off until the next meeting to look into it a bit deeper. It’s not that they (the state) don’t understand,” Ishida said in regards to the state of California, “it’s called self-preservation...Do you want the door slammed on your face or do you want that door open to a degree?”

The Board of Supervisors will consider adopting the amendment at the next regular meeting, set for 9 a.m. Tuesday, Jan. 11 in the County Administration Building, 2800 W. Burrel Ave., Visalia.