

# Windsor now sending its wastewater to The Geysers

Clark Mason, Santa Rosa Press Democrat, 6-11-11

With the press of a button, Windsor Mayor Steve Allen Thursday inaugurated a system that will send millions of gallons of treated wastewater northward, connecting to Santa Rosa's pipeline and The Geysers geothermal field.

The new pump station he activated at Windsor's Corporation yard helps resolve the town's dilemma of storing and disposing its excess treated wastewater. According to Windsor officials, it's environmentally superior and a less costly alternative to other options.

"It's clean. It's green energy," said Town Manager Matt Mullan, as he stood beside the pumps that had just come to life with a quiet hum. "It's not fossil. It's renewable energy."

Windsor has agreed to pay Santa Rosa more than \$28 million over 27 years to hook into the 41-mile pipeline to The Geysers.

At the geothermal field, wastewater is injected deep into the ground to generate steam that in turn runs electricity-producing turbines.

Windsor officials say linking to The Geysers pipeline, which runs on nearby Windsor Road, is cheaper than a previous proposal to build a massive storage pond off Eastside Road for the recycled water. That would have cost more than \$35 million upfront and also have required the removal of 2,200 trees, mostly oaks.

"It's substantially less and pretty instantaneous and without the loss of all the oaks," Allen said of The Geysers connection.

The Eastside Road pond option is not entirely dead, but officials said The Geysers connection will push it off for a decade or more.

Building a connection to the Geysers pipeline cost Windsor \$1.9 million. Santa Rosa utility workers will actually be responsible for operating and maintaining the new pump station.

Santa Rosa officials present at the ribbon-cutting said Windsor's participation in the project should help keep rates down for everyone.

"It will help pay off capital costs," said Santa Rosa Utilities Director Miles Ferris. "It makes rate sense."

Both Santa Rosa and Windsor have struggled with making their wastewater systems less vulnerable to the weather.

For example in a dry winter, wastewater discharges into the Russian River are curtailed. At other times, if the ground is too wet, the recycled water can't be used for irrigation. The Geysers system helps minimize the weather vagaries.

Santa Rosa's sewage plant, which also serves Rohnert Park, Sebastopol and Cotati, has sent the bulk of its wastewater to The Geysers since 2003.

With the hook-up to the pipeline, Windsor will send about a quarter of its wastewater, or roughly 200 million gallons annually, to The Geysers.

More than 300 million gallons will still be disposed of through irrigation, primarily for vineyards and pasture and urban re-use.

But instead of disposing as much as 480 million gallons annually into Mark West Creek, which flows to the Russian River, that will be cut substantially due to The Geysers option, according to Craig Scott, Windsor's assistant town engineer.

“It will reduce the total volume every year discharged into Mark West Creek,” he said.