

Seeking solutions on groundwater

Getting reclaimed water to the MST is just one piece of puzzle

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The recent news that the city of Napa might offer drinking water to some residents in Coombsville is welcome, as the city could modestly alleviate the need for property owners in the unincorporated area to draw groundwater from their diminishing wells.

Yet bolder action is needed in Coombsville, or more accurately the watershed of Milliken, Sarco and Tulocay creeks. That's why the county is considering building \$12 million recycled water pipeline in the area, and why local officials are working with Sonoma and Marin county water agencies on a plan for a regional pipeline.

Coombsville is only one piece of the puzzle, though. Even bolder action is required to ensure that the county's groundwater supply is reliable and sustainable in the long term.

So far, the problem has surfaced most visibly in the MST and in Carneros. But the whole valley has been under fairly intense groundwater use for decades, and that is likely to continue.

Eventually, the county and its cities need to make maximum use of available reclaimed or recycled water for irrigation and landscaping.

This will prove to be a tall task, because it is likely to require pipelines that can carry reclaimed water from Napa Sanitation District's south Napa treatment plant and the treatment plants of local cities to properties on the valley floor.

Michael Abramson, the general manager of Napa Sanitation District, is an advocate of an idea that would reduce or eliminate the need for storage reservoirs, that otherwise would present a formidable problem.

Abramson notes that vineyards reservoirs, hundreds of them, dot the county. If reclaimed water can be economically delivered to these ponds for use in dry months, it will take a huge burden off the local groundwater supply.

That solves the riddle of where the water can be stored, but not how to deliver it.

In the long run, Napa County, the Napa Sanitation District, cities and other agencies must address the long-term effects of intensive groundwater use around the valley and find solutions that will sustain agriculture here for decades to come. The answers are not likely to come cheap, but local political and agricultural leaders need to begin asking the questions.