

Six Years Later, the Cambria Sustainable Water Facility Seeks a Permit

By Tina Dickason



The Cambria Community Service District's water facility project, known as the Emergency Water Supply (EWS), but given a new name by the CCSD -- the Sustainable Water Facility (SWF) -- with a different purpose and intent, and without voter approval, has finally reached the San Luis Obispo Planning Department, as the CCSD seeks a regular (non-emergency) Coastal Development Permit.

The CCSD changed the name to the SWF primarily to promote development of the Water Wait List (approx. 650 parcels), allowing for growth.

To confirm what Cambrians were led to believe they were both voting and paying for, here is an excerpt from the June 6, 2014, Notice of Proposed Increase in Water Rates to Fund an Emergency Water Supply Project:

"The increase in water rates is intended to fund the cost of an Emergency Water Supply Project. Because projected water demands could exceed available supplies from the Santa Rosa and San Simeon Creek aquifers (Cambria's only water supply sources), the CCSD has determined that an Emergency Water Supply project is vital to ensure the security of Cambria's water supply during the upcoming dry season. On May 15, 2014, San Luis Obispo County issued an emergency permit to the CCSD for the construction and operation of an Emergency Water Supply Project to serve existing customers within the CCSD's service area. The proposed water rate increases are necessary for the CCSD to continue to provide safe and reliable water services to the citizens of Cambria."

To appeal the project to the Coastal Commission, there are various steps that have to be taken first. The project came before the North Coast Advisory Council (NCAC) at their August 19 meeting, where, despite receiving 83 letters opposing the project, with 68 in favor, the Council recommended approval.

As it approaches the Planning Commission, all that is basically required is for you to voice your opposition to the SWF. Two good reasons to oppose it: Cambrians didn't vote for it, and growth was never mentioned in the EWS.

You may have your own thoughts on reasons to oppose the project* – the important thing is that the County receive as many comments from the public as possible opposing it. (Submitting a comment does not involve you in an appeal process; that will be decided upon by members of the community who may wish to proceed with an appeal).

One of the letters NCAC ignored at its August 19 meeting was from County Planning, sent to the CCSD on August 14 and taking seven pages to list the project's deficiencies. Here are a few:

“Please review the Coastal Plan Policies (attached) and please provide a written justification of how the proposed project will meet the following policies:

Chapter 6 - Environmentally Sensitive Habitats

Policy 3. Habitat Restoration – requires restoration of damaged habitats as a condition of approval when feasible.

Policy 7. Protection of Environmentally Sensitive Habitats – requires restoration of wetlands.

Policy 8. Principally Permitted Use – requires special findings if the proposed project is not principally permitted use (special use).

Policy 11 and 12. Regional Water Quality Control Board “208” Program and CDFW Review - RWQCB/CDFW review may be required.

Policy 16. Adjacent Development – Development shall be located as far away from the wetland as feasible.

Policy 17 and 18. Wetland Buffer – requires buffer of minimum of 100 feet in width measured from upland extent of the wetland. For buffers less than 100 feet, mitigation measure shall be required to ensure wetland protection.

Policy 20. Coastal Streams and Riparian Vegetation – requires protection and preservation of natural hydrological system and ecological function of coastal streams.

Policy 21. Development in or Adjacent to a Coastal Stream – requires design and siting of the project to prevent impacts to coastal habitats.

Policy 23. County and State Review of Coastal Stream Projects – requires SWRCB and the County to ensure that the beneficial use of coastal stream water is protected. The proposed project shall ensure that the quantity and quality surface water discharge from streams and rivers shall be maintained at levels necessary to sustain the functional capacity of streams.

Policy 22, and 25: Streambed Alteration and CDFW Review – requires review of 1601-1603, may also require a permit from USACE. All project must employ best feasible mitigation measures.

Policy 26. Riparian Vegetation – alteration of naturally occurring vegetation that protects riparian habitat is not permitted except for permitted streambed alteration (Policy 23) where no feasible alternative exists or an issue of public safety exists.

Policy 27. Stream Diversion Structures – shall be sited and designed to not impeded up and downstream movement of native fish or to reduce stream flows to a level which would significantly affect the biological productivity of the fish and other stream organisms.

Policy 28. Buffer Zone for Riparian Habitats – rural area requires 100 feet between any new development. Other uses that may be found appropriate are limited to utility lines, pipelines, drainage and flood control facilities, bridges and road approaches to bridges to cross a stream and roads when it can be demonstrated that: 1) alternative routes are infeasible or more environmentally damaging and 2) adverse environmental effects are mitigated to the maximum extent feasible.

Policy 28, 29 and 35: Protection of Terrestrial Habitats (TH) and Native Vegetation – TH and native vegetation shall be protected whenever possible. All development shall be designed to disturb the minimum amount possible of wildlife or plant habitat.”

In the unlikely event that the NCAC was unaware of County Planning’s August 14 letter, I alerted the Council to its existence over an hour and a half before their August 19 meeting. The council chair excluded the letter from discussion, and the council voted to support the project.

*Go to <http://www.sierraclub.org/santa-lucia/santa-lucian> and click on the issues featuring these articles:
Sept. 2014: “Cambria CSD Still Crazy After All These Years”
Jan. 2015: “Cambria’s Shock Doctrine”
April 2015: “Cambria Reaps First Installment on the Whirlwind”
May 2015: “A Regulatory Reality Check”
June 2016: “Backwards Still Runs Cambria’s Water Scheme”
Jan. 2017: “Cambria CSD Brings Home an F on Its EIR”
Mar. 2017: “Chronic Violator”