

New infrastructure to reduce Pajaro Valley water problems

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Thursday, Oct. 1, 2015 - 5:58 p.m.

<http://www.santacruzsentinel.com/20151001/new-infrastructure-to-reduce-pajaro-valley-water-problems>



Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency on Thursday celebrated a groundbreaking for three projects to deal with water problems. (Dan Coyro -- Santa Cruz Sentinel)

WATSONVILLE >> Thanks to the drought in a limited sense, water officials secured grants sooner than expected, speeding up projects that'll combat Pajaro Valley's biggest water problems: groundwater overdraft and saltwater intrusion.

The city of Watsonville and the Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency celebrated Thursday the groundbreaking of a new 1.5 million gallon storage tank and two new pipelines, which will increase the amount of recycled water available to about 35 growers on more than 50 ranches.

"We need more water supply," said Brian Lockwood, senior water resources hydrologist for PV Water. "The overall demand is 10,000 acre feet a year. When everything is maxed out, we can only deliver 7,000 acre feet."

An acre foot of water is roughly 326,000 gallons - and enough to irrigate a half-acre of strawberries or supply water to two families of four for a year.

Building the storage tank, which is expected to take a year, will allow the local water recycling plant on Beach Road to rev up production. Since growers irrigate during the day, the recycling plant currently doesn't process nighttime flows because it doesn't have anywhere to store the water.

The water agency is also building another pipeline that will blend ground water with recycled water to reduce salts in the supply. The other new pipeline will expand the infrastructure delivering recycled water to another 180 acres of farmland.

Construction for both is set to finish by the end of the year.

"These are important projects part of the Basin Management Plan for bringing the ground water basin into balance," said Mary Bannister, the water agency's general manager. "They will make about 1,000 acre feet available each year and allow us to provide water to those who've been suffering from impacted and intruded wells."

Since a few of his wells became salty, Kitayama Bros., a flower farm near Watsonville, has become somewhat of an advocate for recycled water.

"Delivered water has been very important to us," Kitayama Bros.' Stuart Kitayama said before speaking at the event. "I don't think we could cover our water needs right now if we didn't have it."

As the perpetual problem of groundwater shortage, which leads to saltwater intrusion, continues to worsen, PV Water has been working to fund projects that will help solve the problem.

First state groundwater regulations signed last November require that basins are brought back into balance by 2040. The Pajaro Valley's basin needs an average of 12,100 acre feet of water returning back into it each year to balance its deficit, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

PV Water recently received several grants made available by Gov. Jerry Brown's emergency drought response efforts and is pursuing more. The projects cost \$11.2 million, and the agency so far has received \$4.58 million in grants.