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134th KZGN News Talking Points Editorial

By Tom Wiknich

Can we use rain water to recharge the aquifer? What about the water in the Bowman flood channel?”

First, a couple comments we received from last Thursday’s editorial titled: Did the city council vote to keep the water fountain on, the right vote? My conclusion, after the staff report on the actual use of the fountain, was the council decision to keep the fountain operating was the right one. I also stated the only aspect that would support shutting it off was the principle of the issue of just conserving water any way we can.

Here are the comments. Skip said, “I agree Tom.” Larry said, “When I saw this on the council agenda, I thought, really? I agree with the council’s decision to continue operating the fountain. By the way, when my wife and I married, we rented facilities at Kerr-McGee and the fountain was a nice backdrop for many of our wedding pictures!” Like I predicted, Michael wrote, “I disagree. It is a matter of principle. Why can't our leaders lead by example? Why can't we ‘complainers’ expect our leaders to live by the rules they enforce upon the people they serve. We little people, the ‘complainers’, are bombarded with the gloom and doom stories to support/abide the rules of water conservation. In short, if the need to conserve water is as vital as we complainers are led to believe it is either vital for everyone, or the doom and gloom gets lost in translation.” Another person (I forgot to get his name) stopped me in Albertsons and said this, “Heck, I’m sick of this argument about water. What I’d like to see is our leaders get together and do a decent study to determine exactly what our situation really is. Enough arguing. Someone has to be able to study our aquifer and get us real answers. I guess I agree with that sentiment.

Speaking of water, here’s today’s topic: Can we use rain water to recharge the aquifer? What about the water in the Bowman flood channel? I’ll admit right from the start, this editorial will be more questions than answers. A few months ago I asked the city council what we’re doing to get ready for the El Niño coming. As it turned out, they did absolutely nothing to “get ready for the El Niño”. It was then predicted that it would bring us substantial rain. While that really didn’t happen, we did get some decent rain, but not the huge El Niño predicted. I have to say, the council did nothing to get ready to capture the rain water we received.

Water analysis states that 74% of the fresh water California gets every year flows out into the ocean. California does not have, and will not build sufficient water storage to capture that water. What about the city? I have to wonder, can we inject rain water into the aquifer? I can’t seem to get a good answer to that. I asked the council, what about the water the Bowman flood channel stores when it rains. Why can’t that water get used somehow, instead of just letting it sit there and evaporate? Could a drain or well pipe be installed down into the aquifer, and let it drain into the aquifer? I guess one of the first concerns that would be raised is what contaminants might be in the water when drained into the aquifer? That should be a concern, but there has to be a way we could inject that water into the aquifer. Will it be much help for the overdraft? I don’t know. I’m not a water study guy. However, just like some folks preach “principle” in water conservation, wouldn’t capturing that water and injecting it into the ground be a good thing? Has the city council looked into this idea? I don’t think so. Has anyone looked into the idea? I haven’t heard anyone discuss it yet.

The council has discussed building a new sewer plant. One of the options was tertiary treatment of the water, to make it suitable to be injected back into the aquifer. That is probably a good thing to look into. If the city is willing to spend millions of dollars, building that option to the new sewer plant, I can’t understand why we aren’t looking at the water in the Bowman flood channel for the same purpose. The Bowman flood channel is designed to run the water into the area of the city’s old sewer plant on County Line Rd by the animal shelter. It is there that the city’s sewer plant on the base pumps water back to the area by the shelter to grow alphalfa. Why can’t we drill a well there and inject the water into the aquifer? I’m sure someone will add that there isn’t enough water to be cost effective. Think about this, besides letting the Bowman flood channel fill up when it rains, we also let the dry lakes on base fill up too. Mirror lake and China Lake. Rain water does run off and pool in these normally dry lakes. All we do with the water is let it sit there and evaporate. Again, China Lake is close to the sewer plant on the base. It could be tied by pipe line to the sewer plant on base pretty easy. Mirror Lake is usually just the run off coming from the south end of town in the vicinity of the Bowman flood channel.

Back in the 1970’s the Army Corp of engineers determined that the Bowman flood channel could catch and control at least 50% of the flood water that falls in the valley. This project could really help the “principled” water conservationists. This is a project the entire valley has a stake in: the county, the city, the navy, heck even our friends in Trona. They tap our aquifer and run the water to Trona. All these agencies should get together and do something already. We are forming the groundwater sustainability agency to handle the issue, which has to be established by state law. Do you realize we are now over six months into the setting up of this agency and the main parties are still just discussing the legal document we are going to use to establish the agency. Why can’t the main players, just commit to go into a meeting, (an open to the public meeting) each with their attorneys, and sit there and get it done already. Instead of meeting after meeting they spend a couple hours yacking and accomplishing little, if anything. We have water sitting in the valley. Just like the state, we do nothing with the water, yet everyone says we have a water problem we must fix or perish. Our leaders just argue over the formation documents for months and months.

In conclusion, just once, I wish our county and city would get together and do something about the problem. Enough talk already. Enough meetings already. Do something.

I’m Tom Wiknich, and that’s what I think. I’d like to know what you think. If you have any comments about this editorial, or would like to discuss or recommend a topic, I’d like to hear from you. Please email them to info@kzgn.net.