

MANTECA BULLETIN

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DAILY WEATHER



Mostly cloudy
with a chance
of showers.

Today's high: 52

Low: 36

Yesterday: High 54,
low 43.

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VOL. 97, NO. 4

PRICE 50¢

Deal means ag fees for buyers of new homes

Water from the just completed Woodward Reservoir treatment will start flowing through Manteca's faucets in early July.

The secure surface water supply means Manteca will start relying less on underground sources that are being overdrafted.

It also means new home buyers will start paying fees to help preserve farmland and open space.

A negotiated settlement to a Sierra Club lawsuit filed over the \$138 million South County Surface Water Treatment Plant means Manteca over the next 20 to 30 years could generate enough money to protect hundreds of acres from development.

The deal which the Manteca City Council agreed to in July requires the city to impose a \$2,000 per acre farmland conversion fee on land that is being developed. Of that, \$1,000 will go to the San Joaquin Agricultural Land Trust for the purpose of purchasing farmland or open space for preservation. The council on Monday night took the first step toward formally putting the fee in place.

The remaining \$1,000 would go to the city to acquire agricultural land for preservation although 25 percent of that money can not go to buy land that would be used for the disposal of wastewater effluent.

Based on the number of additional Manteca acres -- 8,000 -- that could ultimately be developed with water from the new treatment plant, Manteca could collect \$16 million.

That means Manteca would have a fee in place to accomplish two things.

- First, it would give the city money to go toward less costly land disposal for wastewater and meet a goal environmental groups have of not returning treated wastewater to the Delta.
- Second, it will provide a mechanism for Manteca to meet stated goals in its general plan to pursue the preservation of agricultural land.

Some subdivisions have been paying agricultural mitigation fees but so far there is no plan by the city on what to do with the money.

The settlement could jump-start a proposal by Mayor Willie Weatherford to obtain 200 acres south of Woodward Avenue near the San Joaquin River for the creation of wetlands using recycled wastewater.

Manteca, of course, wouldn't have \$8 million -- 50 percent of the ultimate amount that could be collected -- in hand at once. Instead, it will dribble in over the years.

But if it did, \$8 million would allow the city to purchase upwards of 400 acres of farmland to protect from development based on a price of \$20,000 an acre.

That is an area eight times larger than Woodward Park.

In all likelihood, however, easements that give the farmer money up front in exchange for deed restrictions that mean the land can never be developed would be pursued since it costs less money.

The Sierra Club actually lost its challenge to the adequacy of the environmental impact report prepared by the South San Joaquin Irrigation District as the lead agency in a July 2001 court decision. But the Sierra Club, along with Deltakeeper and the Sport Fishing Alliance appealed the ruling.

The environmental groups argued the project impact report didn't adequately address the impact providing treated water would have on the urbanization of the South County involving SSJID partners in the project -- the cities of Manteca, Lathrop, Tracy and Escalon.

The four cities will pay \$850,000 to fund water quality programs that benefit eco-systems either on the Stanislaus River or the Lower San Joaquin River or San Francisco Bay-Delta.

Tracy, Manteca and Lathrop are imposing the farmland conversion fee while SSJID paid plaintiff legal fees of \$116,000.

The farmland fees would ultimately generate as much as \$10.4 million from Lathrop developers

The water project

Water will start flowing from the treatment facility -- now just a steel skeleton -- by the summer of 2005. It will have the latest high-tech safe guards to protect water supplies for Manteca, Lathrop and Tracy from possible pollution or contamination.

Environmental studies noted the surface water treatment plant is expected to:

- stabilize underground water supplies and turn the tide against salt intrusion.
- remedy serious water quality concerns in Tracy and Lathrop.
- allow Manteca to grow to an ultimate population of 190,000 people.
- assure existing Manteca residents a clean and stable water supply.

- make it easier for agricultural operations that compete with South County cities for underground water to have adequate irrigation supplies in the future.
- halt if not slightly reverse the salt water intrusion problem.

One hundred and fifty years ago, the water table in the valley was higher than the salt water in the Delta. Over the years, the valley water table has dropped putting the Delta salt water on a higher level.

Salt water is heavier which means it will invade aquifers that once had fresh water.

Salt water intrusion is posing major problems already in Tracy and Lathrop.

During the last drought, farmers as far east as Jack Tone Road detected salt in their irrigation water.

Salt in steady and large quantities can render farmland infertile.

By DENNIS WYATT

Managing editor of the

Manteca (Calif.) Bulletin

[Strawberry fields aren't forever](#)

A week or so of berries left

[Manteca auto burglary up 27%](#)

Police Chief Charlie Halford knows criminals stealing from vehicles like to window shop.

[Deal means ag fees for buyers of new homes](#)

Water from the just completed Woodward Reservoir treatment will start flowing through Manteca's faucets in early July.

[Price is right of MHS grad & bride-to-be](#)

Terri Richichi, come on down!

[Ripon's Old City Hall is hitting the road](#)

RIPON -- Through sheer force of personality, John Mangelos, owner of the Barnwood Restaurant, pulled from his wide net of contacts the resources necessary to save and refurbish Ripon's old City Hall, a staple of the community for decades.