

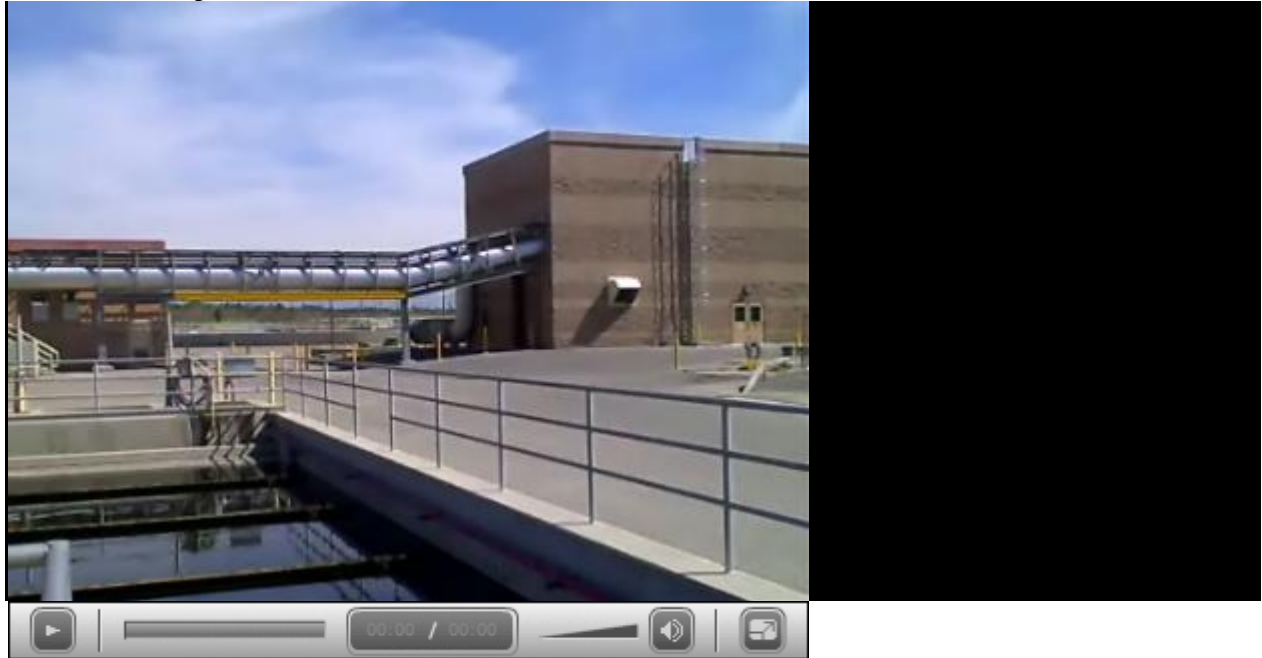
City hopes to turn wastewater into irrigation source

RECYCLING: Riverside officials seek the City Council's endorsement of the \$100 million project.

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By JENNIFER BOWLES

The Press-Enterprise



Video: Riverside's wastewater treatment plant

It may not always rain in the Inland region, but folks are sure to flush their toilets, take showers and wash dishes.

That constant source of wastewater, once treated, is what will keep Riverside's economic engine thriving for the next century through drought and maintain the greenery of its parks, cemeteries and school grounds, Riverside Public Utilities officials believe.

They will be among those asking the City Council today to endorse the concept of a \$100 million project that would pipe treated wastewater throughout parts of Riverside for irrigation. It will save the better-quality local groundwater for drinking, they say.

The program is among the priciest of those touted under the Riverside Renaissance, a \$1.8 billion, five-year program that includes building new electric infrastructure, parks, underpasses and overpasses at

railroad crossings, and the renovation of the Fox Theatre as a performing arts center.

But City Councilman Rusty Bailey believes the cost of the water project will be offset in the future if the city can sell additional water to neighboring areas hit harder by drought.

"There's not too many arguments against doing this," Bailey said. "Despite the economic times we're in right now, this is going to pay for itself and more, and as well as lead the area in being water-wise."

Story continues below



Silvia Flores / The Press-Enterprise

Treated water flows into a channel that will bring it to the Santa Ana River. A proposal would let Riverside keep billions of gallons of that water for irrigation.

Both Bailey and Kevin Milligan, the city utility's assistant general manager for water, likened approving the project to Riverside's pioneers building the Gage Canal 130 years ago to bring water from the Santa Ana River near San Bernardino and acquiring other rights to groundwater north of the city to foster its then-burgeoning citrus industry.

"So we're in the same position," Milligan said. "If we want to thrive as a city for the next 100 years, we're going to need water."

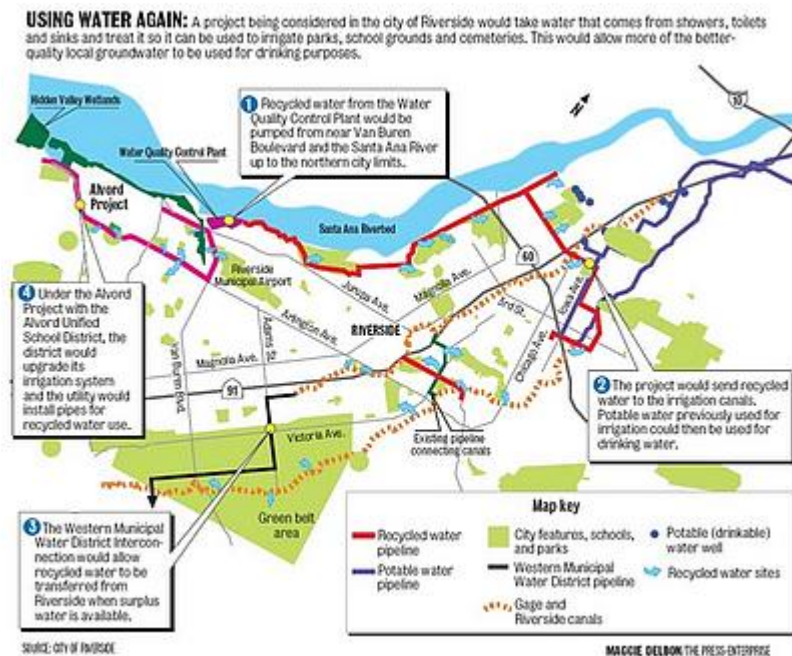
It is one of the Inland region's more ambitious projects in recent years to use so-called recycled water as imported supplies are increasingly

limited by drought, climate change and protections for endangered species. By 2030, the water that can be recycled will account for one-third of what the city uses, Milligan said.

"It's local, it's controllable and it's fairly drought-proof," he said.

"People flush their toilets year-round whether it rains or not."

Story continues below



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Milligan said an endorsement by the City Council will help the city get grants from state and federal agencies to fund the project.

"It's a lot of money; we don't want to embark on this ambitious program without them buying into it," Milligan said.

Funding in 1991 from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation helped the Perris-based Eastern Municipal Water District build a major pipeline that connects four recycling water treatment plants and expand the district's ability to deliver the water for irrigation. The district has been providing treated wastewater to farmers for feed and fodder crops since 1966, said Peter Odencrans, a district spokesman.

Overcoming Stigma

Story continues below



Silvia Flores / The Press-Enterprise
Jason Braeger watches treated water flow into a channel from the Water Quality Control Plant in Riverside.

Riverside is able to go forward with the project because about 10 years ago, officials applied to the state for the right to keep some of its treated wastewater. That water is currently dumped into the Santa Ana River and makes its way to Orange County.

The permit, received this summer from the State Water Resources Control Board, allows the city to keep 13 billion gallons of that water.

As it stands, the stinky sludge that makes its way from homes and businesses to the city's sewage treatment plant by the river near Van Buren Boulevard turns into pretty clean water that gushes out into the river. The water undergoes a tertiary treatment, meaning it is sent through a maze of pipes and pools to remove solids, bacteria and viruses.

Because it's not initially going to be used for drinking water -- Milligan said one day the recycled water may be put into aquifers and pumped up for use later -- the public stigma that can be associated with a toilet-to-tap program may not surface.

"The regulations are such that tertiary treated water is pretty doggone clean; it's not like the old days," said Brad Hudson, Riverside's city manager.

Information: www.riversideca.gov/city_clerk/agenda.asp; click item
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