



Recycled water project under way in Camarillo

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Leisure Village in Camarillo has completed the first half of a recycled water program that will drastically reduce water costs and conserve 180 million gallons of water a year, officials say. The final phase of the project will begin late this summer.

The 415-acre retirement community complex has entered into an agreement with the Camrosa Water District and the Calleguas Municipal Water District that allows the village to water its entire green belt, some 186 acres that include a golf course and large grass meadows and fields, with recycled water.

The idea began with a water management committee made up of Leisure Village residents some 10 years ago. However, that committee didn't get to the point of discussing recycled water. When the committee re-formed in 2003, it began taking the idea seriously.

"I was playing golf one day out here and was talking to some people about the water used for keeping everything green. And I asked, Why in the world are we using drinking water with all this grass?" said Bob Ellis, a Leisure Village resident who moved there in 2002 after retiring as a supervisor for Dominguez Water Co. in Los Angeles County.

In 2003, Ellis got himself elected to the water management board. "I used the mantra of using reclaimed or recycled water to get elected."

The project got under way in 2005 and began with Camrosa providing the pump and headworks that draw the water out of Conejo Creek along the back, or eastern boundary, of Leisure Village. The water is highly treated wastewater from the Hill Canyon treatment plant in the Santa Rosa Valley.

"It's an ambitious project," said Frank Royer, general manager of Camrosa Water District. "But it reduces our reliance on imported water and pays for itself in five years or less. Leisure Village's sheer size means conservation of imported water, lower costs and an overall boost to the environment while keeping the enormous greenbelt within the complex consistently green.

"It's not just Leisure Village that wins with this," said Ellis. "It's the whole city. It's a win-win for everybody."

Currently, the project is completed from Mountain View Avenue in the village to Leisure Village West Drive. Proposals for bids will be going out this summer, and construction on the rest of the project will begin in early fall. Completion is scheduled in summer 2009.

"The project involves a lot of digging, a lot of hand digging under the streets and connecting pipe there in some cases, so it's a lot of work," said Bob Scheaffer, general manager of Leisure Village.

Scheaffer, Ellis and Royer all pointed out that as the cost of potable water continues to rise, recycled water will be the wave of the future.

"In many ways, Leisure Village is on the cutting edge," said Royer. "We have another recycled water project called the Conejo Creek project, and most of that water is used for agricultural purposes."

Leisure Village's use of recycled water is among the first of its kind for residential uses in Ventura County, according to Royer and Scheaffer. Recycled water is widely used in the region, including at golf courses and other landscaped areas.

The water that originates at the Hill Canyon treatment plant moves down Conejo Creek to a diversion structure that channels it to several 10-million-gallon holding ponds near CSU Channel Islands.

Pumps push the water through pipes more than a mile back upstream in the creek bed and into Leisure Village. There, it flows through smaller pipes to sprinklers.

"We've actually got a surplus when we use recycled water this way, and so there's no need to cut back on irrigation," said Royer.

The total cost of the project stands at \$3 million and is being paid for by Leisure Village homeowner association dues.

The savings produced by the use of the recycled water means that water bills will not increase for residents, and dues will not be affected by the recycled water system's use or construction, according to the association's leaders.

About 90,000 sprinkler heads are in use on the 186 acres of greenbelt in the complex. Ten percent have been replaced with water-saving heads, and officials expect to replace most of the others.

"Twenty-five percent of the value of these homes is the landscaping," said Scheaffer. "Now that we're in a drought, if we cut back on watering, all of this greenery will turn brown, and homeowners here lose value if that happens."

With the use of recycled water, however, there is no need to cut back on keeping the landscape irrigated.



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