

MH water deal not yet set

By Michael Ellis Langley | Posted: Monday, June 22, 2015 10:35 am

The South San Joaquin Irrigation District board is meeting Tuesday morning to discuss a possible deal to sell water to the Mountain House Community Services District.

According to SSJID General Manager Jeff Shields, Mountain House General Manager Edwin Pattison called him last week to inquire about buying water.

Shields said that SSJID maintains about 200,000 acre-feet of water — an acre-foot is equal to about 326,000 gallons — stored in New Melones Reservoir, Lake Tulloch and other foothill reservoirs.

Shields said that Pattison then initiated a conference call with him and the State Water Resources Control Board to discuss whether the sale of stored water would be legal, given the conservation order issued June 12.

Shields said the board representatives told the irrigation district it could provide water to Mountain House.

He also said the SSJID board would convene its regular meeting Tuesday morning to discuss the possible sale.

“We are nowhere near a deal. We have some options, I believe,” Shields said. “It’s important that if we can help, we need to.”

According to Shields, the market cost of an acre-foot of water right now is between \$500 and \$700. He could not comment on what the SSJID board might choose to charge Mountain House if it approved the sale.

“We’re not here to gouge and take advantage of these situations,” he said.



Mountain House water

Sprinklers water a lawn on Bethel Avenue in Mountain House in July 2014.

The SSJID board meeting is at 9 a.m. in the district office boardroom, 11011 E. Highway 120, in Manteca.

12:15 p.m.

A midnight deadline for water service to Mountain House was averted this afternoon after a decision by the state.

According to state Sen. Cathleen Galgiani (D-Stockton), who represents Mountain House, the State Water Resources Control Board issued a letter to South San Joaquin Irrigation District allowing it to sell 1,800 acre-feet of stored water to the community between now and the end of the year.

Mountain House General Manager Edwin Pattison received a letter Monday morning from Byron Bethany Irrigation District stating that water diversions to Mountain House would end tonight, as of 12:01 a.m. Tuesday.

“The State Water Resources Control Board has issued a notice to Byron-Bethany Irrigation District informing BBID that there is no water available for diversion,” the letter read. “There is no exception for public health and safety.”

Galgiani said she inserted herself into the situation after reading reports about the situation last Tuesday.

“We all panicked, I think, when we saw the news last week,” she said today. “We reached out to the governor’s office and State Water Resources Control Board and looked at what options might be available to Mountain House other than BBID.”

SSJID faced the question of whether selling water it had stored would violate the state’s order to divert no water.

“Because we got involved and working with the governor’s office, we were able to get them to agree that it would not affect the South San Joaquin Irrigation District if they were able to sell to Mountain House,” Galgiani said. “Now that SSJID does not have to worry about an adverse effect related to diversion, they have agreed to provide for Mountain House.”

Jeff Shields, SSJID general manager, was not yet available for comment.

At noon, George Kostyrko with the water board called the Tracy Press to say that the board had informed Pattison that Mountain House would not be cut off tonight.

Pattison said Monday morning that the Community Services District Board of Directors would hold a closed special meeting at 2 p.m. to discuss the options available to the community. The

directors are expected to consider the agreement with SSJID and other options to alleviate the water crisis.

One acre-foot of water is 325,851 gallons, the amount of water that would cover an acre of land one foot deep. As of June, Mountain House's average daily water use is 97 gallons per person.

10:35 a.m.:

Pending a last-minute reprieve from the state or legal intervention, Byron Bethany Irrigation District will shut off water diversions to Mountain House at midnight.

BBID General Manager Rick Gilmore sent a letter to Mountain House General Manager Edwin Pattison on Monday morning with the details of the shutoff.

“The State Water Resources Control Board has issued a notice to Byron-Bethany Irrigation District informing BBID that there is no water available for diversion,” the letter read. “There is no exception for public health and safety.”

The letter said that BBID will shut down its diversion at 12:01 a.m.

Pattison said Monday morning that the Community Services District Board of Directors will hold a closed special meeting at 2 p.m. to discuss the options available to the community.

“We’re not going to run out of water. We’re just looking at all the options we have, including legal,” Pattison said. “Everything seems to be heading to court.”

The general manager added that he was circulating a letter to the community outlining the various options and CSD responses.

Assemblywoman Susan Talamantes Eggman, who represents Mountain House, has reached out to the water board to encourage it to find a solution, according to spokesman Christian Burkin.

Burkin added that the ultimate power to intervene rests solely with the water board and the office of Gov. Jerry Brown.

The office of state Sen. Cathleen Galgiani was not available for comment.

When asked this morning about the situation, Brown’s office had to research the issue and did not offer any comment, saying someone would get back to the Tracy Press later in the day.