

GENERAL PLAN UPDATE: WATER POLICY ALTERNATIVES

DISCUSSION PAPER

SEPTEMBER 27, 2008

Introduction

The Butte County General Plan Update process is entering Meeting Series #5 that will focus on developing policies for the General Plan. Policies related to water resource management are critical to the General Plan Update process. One of the Guiding Principles for the Butte County General Plan Updates states, “The General Plan shall address the management and protection of water resources.”

The Department of Water and Resource Conservation is assisting the Department of Development Services on developing water policy components of the General Plan Update. The *General Plan Update: Water Policy Alternatives Discussion Paper* presents a draft set of water resource policies that would be part of the General Plan.

Existing Water Policies

The water resource policy alternatives were drafted to complement existing Butte County water resource policies. Existing water resource policies provide an ample foundation to address the key General Plan Update policy questions. The County established a comprehensive strategy regarding water resources in 2005 through the Butte County Integrated Water Resources Plan (IWRP). The IWRP includes comprehensive aspects of water resource management including the Groundwater Management Plan, Inventory and Analysis and a Drought Preparedness Plan. The County has established rules to protect water resources including the Groundwater Conservation Ordinance (Chapter 33). In part, the Groundwater Conservation Ordinance states, “The groundwater underlying Butte County provides the people and lands of Butte County with water for agricultural, domestic, municipal, and other purposes. The groundwater underlying Butte County is a significant water resource which must be reasonably and beneficially used and conserved for the benefit of the overlying land by avoiding extractions which harm the Butte Basin aquifer, causing exceedance of the safe yield or a condition of overdraft. It is essential for the protection of the health, welfare, and safety of the residents of the county, and the public benefit of the state, that the groundwater resources of Butte County be protected from harm. The county seeks to foster prudent water management practices to avoid significant environmental, social, and economic impacts.” A

complementary ordinance (Chapter 33A), established an orderly process to assess groundwater and the means to manage groundwater locally. Through Chapter 23B, the county established rules for well spacing and other well criteria. A more detailed description of these and other county water policies, programs and systems is described in Chapter 12 of the *Settings and Trends* report.

Water Resources Policy Questions

The development of policy alternatives began in 2007. Policy questions were initially identified during Meeting Series #1, and in the first two meetings in Meeting Series #2/3. Ideas were refined and condensed into a list of policy questions and solutions, focusing on those where there was both a high level of community concern and a broad range of suggestions and ideas. The Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) reviewed this list on September 6, 2007, the Planning Commission reviewed it on October 11, 2007, and the Board of Supervisors reviewed it on November 27, 2007. The Board identified three key water policy questions that need to be addressed in the General Plan:

- 1. How should the General Plan protect Butte County's groundwater supply?**
- 2. How should the General Plan protect Butte County's water supply?**
- 3. How should the General Plan maintain and enhance Butte County's water quality?**

In addressing the three key water policy questions, strategies and tools were developed from the initial set of solutions in the November 27, 2007 Policy Alternatives document, comments from community meetings, policies from other counties and the Local Government Commission (Ahwahnee Water Principles).

Water Resources Policy Strategies and Tools

Goal: Protect Groundwater

Strategy: The County shall continue to work cooperatively within the region on water resource management issues.

Strategy: Promote Groundwater Recharge

- Site Specific Recharge Data – The County shall continuously improve the understanding of groundwater recharge and should require the submission of groundwater recharge data conducted by a qualified hydrologist/geologist for areas proposed for development.

- Design - In areas of high groundwater recharge, the county shall require new developments to design the development in a manner that promotes recharge and utilizes permeable materials.
- Recharge Areas – The County shall require new developments to address flooding and erosion issues by establishing water holding areas such as creek beds, recessed athletic fields, ponds, and other features that serve to recharge groundwater, reduce runoff, improve water quality and decrease flooding.
- Protect Wetlands - The County shall give high priority to the protection of watersheds, aquifer-recharge areas and natural drainage systems in any consideration of land use.
- Watershed restoration – The County shall support watershed restoration efforts, coordinate County watershed activities with efforts by other groups, and simplify permit acquisition for watershed restoration and enhancement projects.
- Promoting Infiltration – The County shall enhance water infiltration throughout watersheds to decrease accelerated runoff rates and enhance groundwater recharge.

Strategy: Assure that water supplies that rely on groundwater can support additional demands without impacting third parties or the environment.

- Urban Water Management Plans - Developments greater than 100 units shall have an adequate water supply by requiring that all new developments prepare Urban Water Management Plans that are consistent with and meet the requirements of Senate Bill 610 (SB 610) and Senate Bill 221 (SB 221) that also includes an evaluation of potential impacts to surrounding groundwater users and the environment.
- Monitoring Wells - New developments that rely on groundwater should be required to install monitoring wells that would enhance the county's monitoring network.

Goal: Protect Water Supplies

Strategy: All developments should demonstrate an adequate and sustainable water supply.

- Ensure that all proposed developments have an adequate water supply by requiring that all new developments prepare Urban Water Management Plans that are consistent with and meet the requirements of Senate Bill 610 (SB 610) and Senate Bill 221 (SB 221).

Strategy: Water should be utilized in the most efficient manner.

- Efficient Landscaping - All aspects of landscaping from the selection of plants to soil preparation and the installation of irrigation systems should be designed to reduce water demand, retain runoff, decrease flooding and recharge groundwater.
- Water Use Efficiency - The County should support efforts to encourage water efficiency by residents and businesses and public agencies, including working with water providers, to implement efficient water use programs and incentives that facilitate sound water use practices.
- Technology - Urban water conservation technologies such as low-flow toilets, efficient clothes washers, and more efficient water-using industrial equipment should be incorporated into new construction and retrofitted in remodeled buildings.

Strategy: Table A Utilization

- The county shall implement strategies to fully utilize the State Water Project Table A Allocation.
- New developments should be encouraged to assess the feasibility of utilizing Butte County's State Water Project Table A allocation as a water supply source.

Goal: Protect Water Quality

Strategy: New developments should be designed to minimize runoff and pollution.

- Protecting Streams - New developments should be required to establish buffers from streams to limit pollution from pesticides and nutrients.
- Low Maintenance Landscaping - Landscapes should be designed to be drought and pest tolerant.

Strategy: The County should promote opportunities to recover and utilize waste water.

- Wastewater Recycling - The use of reclaimed wastewater for agriculture and landscape irrigation supply water. Dual plumbing that allows graywater from showers, sinks and washers to be reused for landscape irrigation should be included in the infrastructure of new developments.