

Clovis seeking users for recycled water

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The city of Clovis has a precious commodity available: water.

The city has become prolific at producing recycled water — once better known as sewage — that can be used for landscaping and irrigation.

But its largest user, Clovis Community Medical Center, is consuming 3 million gallons a month, a fraction of the city's monthly output of about 84 million gallons.

Clovis continues to look for new customers while expanding the number of sites on the east side of the city that are plumbed with purple pipes to accommodate recycled water for the city's landscaped areas.

"On peak days, we are only using 25% of what we have available," says Luke Serpa, the city's public utilities director.



84 million gallons of recycled water city of Clovis produces monthly

That means 2.1 million gallons per day, about 7 acre-feet of liquid gold, is being sent from the plant to Fancher Creek. In the winter months, when demand is nonexistent, all the water is sent to Fancher Creek. The Fancher Creek water naturally recharges back into the ground or mixes with agriculture water for irrigation.

The water is treated to the "tertiary level," which means it's clean enough to drink, city officials say, but that's prohibited under state law. It's conveyed through purple pipes, the industry standard for non-potable water.

When the city planned the purple pipe system, it was only supposed to go to newer parts of town. Areas on the east side were plumbed for the pipes, evident from purple pipes that are seen above ground in many east Clovis neighborhoods.

Eventually, the purple pipe will irrigate the southeast side of the city, which is now being built, and the future growth area east of Willow Avenue and north of Shepherd Avenue.

Purple pipes: Industry-standard color for pipes that convey nonpotable water

For now, the city is using the water in its larger parks on the east side of the city, Pasa Tiempo Park at Barstow and DeWolf avenues and Sierra Meadows Park at Temperance and Sierra avenues. Serpa says it could extend to other large city parks.

The other areas are being considered in light of California's new long-term drought rules, which requires Clovis and its users to cut water consumption by 36%.

As the city grows, it will need more capacity to handle waste water from other parts of the city, meaning more water will be processed and available at the water reuse facility near Ashlan and McCall avenues that does filtration and cleansing. Ultimate build-out for the water reuse plant is 8.4 million gallons per day, up from its current capacity of 2.8 million.

"We are trying to see how we can use recycled water in other places," Serpa says. "I expect there to be changes in

the plan, to extend the purple pipe into existing parts of town, but going into existing areas is much more expensive.”

State has no limits

The best reason to use recycled water: The state — so vigilantly watching Californians’ water use — has set no limits on the recycled resource.

It’s a major reason why Clovis touts its use and wants to convince more businesses and public agencies to participate.

The city’s use of recycled water and increased use of surface water through its allocation from the Fresno Irrigation District have revived some water tables for city wells.

“There’s been a drought, so obviously it’s not due to the wet weather,” Serpa says of the rising water tables. “We’ve actually seen some of the levels rise over the past year.”

For now, landscape irrigation is the main use. It’s unlikely the city can ever get recycled water to homes, because it would require installing new pipes and back-flow preventers for each residential user to keep recycled water from mixing with potable water from the city’s drinking water supply. It can be used on crops, even edible crops, under certain conditions.

For more than a year, Clovis Community Medical Center has used the city’s recycled water. The hospital runs its sprinklers throughout the day, greening its 14 acres of grass and sating its thirsty plants and trees.

Initial results are convincing. Recycled water costs about half as much as potable water, the hospital can preserve its potable supplies, and water tables under nearby wells have risen, says John Hall, director of facilities and construction for the Clovis hospital.

“We feel we are doing the right thing for the community, and we’ve saved some money,” Hall says.

He and other hospital officials are regularly besieged by questions about the constantly running sprinklers. Clovis Community Medical Center has posted large signs around the medical center campus announcing that “Our new campus uses recycled water and drought-tolerant landscaping.”

Hall says callers find it difficult to understand that recycled water doesn’t deplete community water supplies.

“It is hard for people to understand that the No. 1 best way to save water in the drought is to use recycled water,” Hall says.

The best part, he said, is that there are no restrictions for the amount of time or number of days recycled water can be used.

Serpa is encouraged by Clovis Community Medical Center’s willingness to use recycled water.

“If a leader in the health-care field like Community Medical Center can use it, hopefully that gets the ball rolling,” he says. “Maybe people will start looking at recycled water as a resource and not as a waste.”

Flowing elsewhere

Caltrans also is using the city’s recycled water along Highway 168.

Caltrans District 6 spokeswoman Gloria Rodriguez says recycled water is used on landscaping between Shepherd and Temperance avenues and that the agency is fixing its watering system to expand recycled water use to the freeway between Bullard and Temperance avenues.

Caltrans also uses the recycled water for street sweepers and to reduce dust on construction projects, she says.

Clovis also continues to look for more users, and an obvious target is Clovis Unified School District. The district has several campuses in newer parts of the city, and the state has found that recycled water poses no threat to students, especially since watering is done during hours when students are off campus.

The district could also save money on its water bills while enhancing its school play areas by not having to limit watering on many campuses.

When the district prepared projects for its most recent bond measure in 2012, the bulk of the \$298 million was for repairs and upgrades, such as solar panels to reduce electric bills. Drought was not on the radar, but it is now, says Kelly Avants, district spokeswoman. The problem the district has today is that no money is immediately available for a recycled water project.

The district is in the initial phase of developing a 10-year plan to “minimize our reliance on wells and city water on our campuses,” Avants says.

Later this year, the district is expecting “one-time” money from the state. It could be used to finance connections to the city’s purple pipe system, but it’s premature to project a timeline, she says.

“We have been looking at this as one of the facility projects that is long-term beneficial to the district and the community,” she says.

The most likely targets for the city’s recycled water are the 160-acre Reagan Educational Center and other schools on the eastern edge of the district. Since much of the city’s purple pipe infrastructure runs along Locan and Temperance avenues, Freedom Elementary and Red Bank Elementary also are likely targets. And, because Harlan Ranch is plumbed with purple pipes and eventually will become part of the system, Bud Rank Elementary could eventually use recycled water, too.

“We are absolutely interested in using that water,” Avants says. “It is something we hope to start using soon.”

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