

Palmdale faces water woes
Consultant says demand to double while supply drastically diminishes
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PALMDALE - A blueprint for city growth designed in the early 1990s won't work given today's water situation and water problems foreseen in the future.

That's what water consultant Ken Kirby told Mayor Jim Ledford Thursday night during a discussion of a proposed Antelope Valley master plan on water supplies, use, conservation and recycling. Approved in 1993, the General Plan indicates sites for homes and businesses, traffic patterns, and locations for amenities such as parks.

When Ledford asked if Palmdale's General Plan was "doable," Kirby said flatly: "No."

With the population growth predicted in the Valley, Kirby said the water demand will double while the supply will be drastically diminished. By the year 2035, the Valley will likely run out of water unless stringent plans are implemented, he said.

"You are facing some of the toughest challenges in the state from my perspective," Kirby said during a joint meeting between the Palmdale City Council and Palmdale Water District.

The meeting was called to discuss the Antelope Valley Integrated Regional Water Management Plan, which proposes projects that would address the water shortage through conservation and water banking, and help with flood control, water quality and habitat restoration.

Kirby described the Valley as a "complex region with growing challenges (facing) much uncertainty in water supply." Sharing information developed during the plan's formulation, he said, is key to getting public agencies to work together toward a common cause - a reliable supply of high quality water.

During a telephone interview Friday, Ledford said of Kirby's comment about the General Plan: "Based on a drought condition, that's a no-brainer. That's why I asked: Is that short-term or long-term?"

In the short-term, Ledford said, people would not object to restrictions or limits on population growth. In the long term, he said, "they'll ask the question, is the growth scenario reality? What if a builder said, 'I'll replace 10,000 (existing) homes with low-flow toilets or devices to save potable water.' That might be their mitigation."

Asked whether the city would place a moratorium on building, the mayor said the question should be addressed to local water agencies. He said Los Angeles County Waterworks District 40 and the Palmdale Water District "will have to answer."

PWD Director Jeff Storm said he would not consider a moratorium on issuing "will-serve" letters, which the water district gives to builders to certify they will be able to get water for new homes or businesses. The Valley has other steps in conservation it hasn't taken, as well as improvements in storing water, he said.

"If staff comes to us and says we need to (stop issuing will-serve letters), that's something we have to look at. Nobody is trying to get will-serve letters right now," Storm said. "Building came to a halt - slowed down considerably. When new projects come along, we'll have to look real close at them and ask the tough questions."