

Water a constant hot topic

THE CHAMBER VIEW

by Pamela Tumpap



There are many issues right now surrounding the use of water in Maui, and more coming down

the pike. As this resource is essential to us all, the Maui Chamber of Commerce wants to encourage everyone to become aware of the consequences of different actions and to engage in the debate. In this article, we want to share two community concerns: the use of water from Hamakuapoko wells and interim in-stream flow standards.

This week, the County Council's Water Resource Committee reviewed a bill that would allow the use of water from the Hamakuapoko wells during drought conditions. We appreciate the committee renewing the issue of the Hamakuapoko wells, which the chamber believes offer a reliable, ready water source now.

The chamber long has felt this treated water should be used for a number of reasons.

A tremendous investment, valued at \$14 million in 2006, already has been made in the Hamakuapoko wells, their treatment system and pipeline. The wells specifically were designed and built to provide water for human consumption, and should be capitalized on.

Additionally, given Maui's frequent drought conditions, all water sources are needed to support residents and industry.

Furthermore, we understand that 1,300 Upcountry families are waiting for water meters and that bringing the Hamakuapoko water on line will allow the county to issue several hundred water meters to those whose projects long have been delayed.

While concerns have been expressed about the quality of this water, we have not seen the science to confirm these concerns. Our understanding is that the county Department of Water Supply, state Department of Health, University of Hawaii and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency all have deemed the treated Hamakuapoko well water as perfectly safe for human consumption. So, if treatment renders the water safe, why wouldn't the water from the Hamakuapoko wells be used?

Rejecting the water for use doesn't make sense, particularly given that the quality of this water is comparable to or better than other water routinely used for human consumption.

Therefore, we encourage the council to bring the Hamakuapoko wells on line — not only during a drought declaration, but continuously, unless or until a significant health threat is identified — to ensure water availability for our community's economic growth and stability.

The matter of interim in-

stream flow standard is being taken up next week by the state Commission on Water Resource Management (CWRM).

What is in-stream flow standard? It is the amount of water that the CWRM will decide must be flowing in a stream before any water can be diverted from the stream for other uses by residents, agriculture, etc.

Currently, the CWRM is considering a hefty recommendation on four West Maui streams known as Na Wai Eha. That recommendation would eliminate the amount of water the county can use for domestic (public) use and agriculture by 50 percent. If adopted, this recommendation threatens residents, businesses, agriculture and our community by taking away much of the water currently used from these streams and returning it back to the streams.

Why is in-stream flow standard such an important issue? Because Maui historically has used stream water to meet the needs of our population for drinking water and agriculture. We rely on it. We understand that historical stream-flow data has been analyzed and that with this harsh recommendation, the county Iao Water Waste Treatment Facility could find itself without water for 73 days and Hawaiian Commercial & Sugar Co. could be without water for its agricultural use for 159 days. These are serious impacts that must be considered.

Furthermore, a decision on

this issue may set a precedent for an additional 19 East Maui streams that soon will be assessed, equating to even more extreme water cutbacks down the road and potentially to a standard statewide.

Therefore, we must act now. We feel the present CWRM recommendation is too severe and threatens to hurt many "off-stream" water users.

We are requesting that more regard be given to the economic and social benefits the use of this water provides, and are joining the community in a petition to ask the CWRM to create a balanced decision for off-stream water use.

For more information on in-stream flow standard, and to lend a hand and add your name to the petition, please visit the link on the Maui County Farm Bureau Web site at www.maui.countyfarmbureau.org/?p=311.

How do we best address water issues? We believe it takes a broad, big-picture approach. We must assess present and future needs, evaluate all available water sources, create new water sources, establish comprehensive solutions that sustain what we have today, and build for tomorrow.

Together we can balance water needs, water use and stream health, and put people first.

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