

 Print Article | [Close Window](#)

September 19, 2007

FLOW mobilizes to conserve, show well not needed

BY GWEN MICKELSON
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

There may be some brown lawns showing up in the upcoming months in Felton.

Grassroots group Felton Friends of Locally Owned Water sent letters to California American Water Co. customers here in an effort to mobilize the 1,350-member ratepayer base to better conserve water.

The group wants to form a unified conservation effort intended in part to show that Cal Am's proposal to drill a \$500,000 well in search of an additional source of water in case of a multi-year drought is not necessary, and that the company's conservation efforts have been inadequate compared with those of neighboring San Lorenzo Valley Water District.

"This is a real stark contrast from the way San Lorenzo Valley Water District runs its system," said Jim Mosher, a member of Felton FLOW, which has led a more-than-four-year push to buy out the water system. "Cal Am doesn't do anything about conservation and just wants to drill an expensive well in a community that can't afford it"

Felton residents in 2005 passed an \$11 million bond to buy the waterworks and asked to become part of the neighboring San Lorenzo Valley Water District, a public agency. The San Lorenzo Valley Water District sued in February to use eminent domain to seize the property.

But Cal Am is only looking to the future, in case drought conditions persist again this winter, and has taken the proper precautions regarding conservation, said Evan Jacobs, community relations manager for Cal Am in Felton.

"I think the steps we've taken for conservation have been entirely appropriate," said Jacobs.

Company representatives went to customers' homes with water conservation schedules and devices in August, the same week the San Lorenzo Valley Water District started its conservation efforts, he said. Cal Am, which has asked customers to cut back 15 percent but not instituted mandatory reductions, also offers a conservation discount.

"We've been really pleased with the conservation we've seen from our customers and are encouraging them to continue to conserve and do more," Jacobs said. "I think it's silly to say we haven't done enough or haven't done as much as other districts"

In July, Cal Am filed a letter with the state Public Utilities Commission advising the commission it was making preparations to drill a new well in Felton.

However, Jacobs is not sure if the company still plans to go forward with the project.

Felton FLOW members think the well is part of the company "trying to figure out ways to make it too expensive for us to buy the system as a key strategy of defeating us in eminent domain," Mosher said.

FLOW will urge customers to increase conservation to 20 percent at a community meeting tonight. The conservation effort is meant to add fire to the claim that putting the town's water system in the hands of the people is in the best interest of those it serves.

FLOW's strategy now is "taking the offense and establishing a record for the court, showing it will be in the public interest for the San Lorenzo Valley Water District to run the system rather than Cal Am because of Cal Am's incompetence in dealing with the drought," said Mosher. "And really it demonstrates that the ratepayers' best interest is not being represented by them. I think this really shows it — their first response is, 'Let's drill an expensive well and not tell anybody.'"

Contact Gwen Mickelson at gmickelson@santacruzsentinel.com.

If You Go

WHAT: FLOW meets to discuss eminent domain lawsuit against Cal Am; Cal Am's proposal to drill a well; and joining San Lorenzo Valley Water District's conservation program.

WHEN: 6:30-9 p.m. today.

WHERE: Felton Firehouse, 131 Kirby St., Felton.

INFORMATION: www.feltonflow.org.

 [Print Article](#)

You can find this story online at:

<http://www.santacruzsentinel.com/archive/2007/September/19/local/stories/07local.htm>

Copyright © Santa Cruz Sentinel. All rights reserved.