

CENTRAL VALLEY BUSINESS TIMES

Deadline looms for East Porterville water sign-ups

March 21, 2017

By: CVBT Staff

East Porterville homeowners eligible for a cost-free connection to a new sustainable water supply must sign up for the service by March 31 or miss this final opportunity to do so, the state Department of Water Resources says.

After the deadline passes, no additional sign-ups will be accepted for the project.

A final sign-up to meet the deadline will be hosted by city of Porterville Community Development Manager Julie Phillips from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Drought Resource Center, 185 South Leggett Street in East Porterville on March 31.

Hundreds of homeowners whose wells went dry during California's five-year drought are eligible for the project, which is financed by state taxpayers to end East Porterville's drought emergency. By completing a three-step sign-up process, homeowners can avoid a connection cost of up to \$10,000 or more.

Residents of East Porterville, an unincorporated area in Tulare County, have been relying on deliveries of bottled water and non-potable water to large temporary tanks installed on their properties. This is being paid for by state taxpayers at a monthly cost of more than \$650,000.

To be connected to the city of Porterville's water distribution system, property owners must sign a consent form and a contract called an extraterritorial service agreement (ESA) and must open a utility account with Porterville. The actual timing to connect to the system will depend on the schedule to lay new distribution lines and complete additional infrastructure. The project's first connection to an East Porterville home with existing water lines was made on August 19, 2016.

Department of Water Resources Project Manager Steve Doe says approximately 300 East Porterville properties are eligible for Phase 1 of the project, which began last summer. Of that number, 290 have been connected to the distribution system. Those remaining in Phase 1 should be connected by the end of this month.

An additional 765 homes are eligible to be connected to new distribution lines during Phase 2. Of that number, about 290 homeowners have not signed up for Phase 2 and have until March 31 to do so. Of the eligible residents, 67 have said they do not wish to participate in the program. Home connections for Phase 2 are scheduled to begin in June.

The East Porterville Water Supply Project is a joint effort by three state agencies – DWR, State Water Resources Control Board and the Office of Emergency Services – and the governments of Tulare County and the city of Porterville. Non-profit organizations participating on the project are the Community Water Center, Self Help Enterprises, Community Services Employment Training and the Porterville Area Coordinating Council.

Eligible East Porterville residents who participate in the project by agreeing to have their property eventually annexed to the city of Porterville will bear none of the connection costs. Once connected, the residents' state-funded water deliveries will end, the temporary water tanks will be removed from their properties and their water wells will be capped. Property owners will receive a monthly bill for their city of Porterville water service.