

UPDATE: Water company merger bill passes through committee

By **GINA ENDER** - March 28, 2017, 2:34 pm



State Senator Scott Wilk, left, speaks to constituent Richard Humanic about his concerns regarding the possible consolidation of Castaic Lake Water Agency and Newhall County Water District on Saturday at City Hall. Samie Gebers/ Signal

Senator Scott Wilk's Senate Bill 634, which would create a new water district in the Santa Clarita Valley, passed through the Senate Committee on Natural Resources 7-0 on Tuesday.

The measure would eliminate the Castaic Lake Water Agency and the Newhall County Water District to create the Santa Clarita Valley agency. Reportedly, this would

save the valley \$14 million over the course of 10 years.

“SB 634 would establish a 21st Century modern government agency that will not only serve the needs of my district, but will become a model for water agencies throughout the state,” Wilk said in a statement. “I am very pleased the committee sees the value in unifying the current patchwork of regional water management in the Santa Clarita Valley into one streamlined agency.” Wilk wants to engage all parties in a collaborative manner to work on this bill that is “a work in progress,” the statement read. The bill will be beneficial to the environment and to customers, he said.

“I am convinced when all is said and done the new agency will provide improved reliability, water quality and allow for a unified regional approach to Santa Clarita Valley water issues,” he said.

Newhall County Water District General Manager Steve Cole said while this passing through committee is a step in the right direction, there is still a lot of work to be done.

“We’re committed to working with the committee and with Senator Wilk to make sure we address the unique aspects of the bill to bring unified water resource management to the valley,” Cole said.

General Manager of Castaic Lake Water Agency Matt Stone said he and his team are appreciative to Wilk and

to the committee for moving the bill forward.

“We look forward to working with Wilk as the bill develops and changes,” Stone said.

President of the Newhall County Water District Maria Gutzeit and Board of Director of the Castaic Lake Water Agency Gary Martin testified in support of the bill.

Gutzeit said the bill provides a pathway to achieve the water agencies’ goals.

“Unified water management in the Santa Clarita Valley will result in lower costs, stronger local water reliability, better watershed planning and a more customer-focused approach to water governance,” Gutzeit said.

Both agencies believe there is much left to do as the bill proceeds, but look forward to strengthening the proposal, Martin said.

“The committee’s support sent the message that modernized, unified water governance is the right approach for the Santa Clarita Valley and the local watershed,” he said.

The Governance and Finance Committee will see the bill next.

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