

SAWS to expand aquifer storage

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San Antonio Water System trustees Tuesday approved a \$21.3 million expansion of its aquifer storage and recovery project, which holds excess Edwards Aquifer water for a not-so-rainy day.

The project now stores about 26,000 acre-feet of excess Edwards water in the sandy Carrizo Aquifer in South Bexar County for use during bad droughts. Officials believe it can hold 30,000 acre-feet or more.

SAWS, which uses a total of about 180,000 acre-feet of water a year, drew small amounts from those stores for the first time this summer, although it has since put some water back.

The aquifer storage contract with Cajun Constructors is part of a second phase of improvements that will double the capacity to move water between the project and the utility's distribution mains from 30 million gallons a day (mgd) to 60 mgd.

The expansion will add another 20-mgd pump to the 50-mgd capacity already in place, along with a 7.5 million gallon storage tank, security station, filter enclosure, chlorine and fluoride facilities and a booster pump and transfer pump.

Water Resources Director Calvin Finch told the board there were only two bidders on the project, and the lowest bid came in 17 percent above the engineers' cost estimate.

"We came to the conclusion that we probably would not benefit by going back out for new bids on this one," Finch said. The high costs, he said, were attributed to record-setting oil prices and a shortage of skilled labor and material due to reconstruction of Gulf Coast areas hit by hurricanes last summer.

The project is expected to cost about \$215 million when completed. The board still has to award a contract for a collection system for the 12 Carrizo wells that were completed last year, bringing the total number of wells to 29.

The board also approved a \$5.3 million contract with the Holloman Corp. to replace almost five miles of water mains in Terrell Hills in connection with that city's street improvement project next spring.

SAWS will replace lines that were originally installed between 1950 and 1952 and that have failure rates 20 times higher than normal. SAWS will replace the lines in advance of the city's major work on the streets in the northeast quadrant of the city.