

SLV wants to dip into Loch Lomond

Geologist reports some district wells are in danger of drying up

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SANTA CRUZ — The San Lorenzo Valley Water District wants to stick its straw back into Loch Lomond Reservoir to supply some 550 customers whose wells could begin running dry in five years.

The district has gone without its legal share of Loch Lomond water for more than 10 years because its needs were supplied by the Olympia well near Zayante, drilled in the early 1980s.

But a geologist's report released in August revealed the southern portion of the Lompico Aquifer, which the district taps for water, is in danger of going dry. The effects could be felt in as soon as five years if nothing is done to stanch the area's reliance on groundwater.

The southern portion of the aquifer ranges from Lockwood Lane area of Scotts Valley to the Mount Hermon Association property. The San Lorenzo Valley Water District serves about 550 customers in that area, and Kaiser quarry also pulls water from that portion of the aquifer.

That's where Loch Lomond comes in.

"There's a certain urgency be-

cause it takes time to implement anything like this, but we're not at a critical point," said James Mueller, manager of the water district.

The district hopes to buy treated Loch Lomond water from the city of Santa Cruz, which relies on the lake for much of its supply. Officials are considering ways to ship the water from Santa Cruz's Rolling Woods treatment facility to the San Lorenzo district's network of pipes nearby.

That water then could be piped to the district's customers, which would dramatically decrease the area's use of groundwater. That, said Mueller, would give that part of the aquifer a chance to recharge naturally.

In late December, the district began formal talks with the Santa Cruz Water Department to figure out if buying treated water is feasible, and whether merging the two systems of pipelines is possible.

San Lorenzo Valley has dibs on a portion of untreated lake water because of an agreement reached before the dam was built in the early 1960s. That agreement earmarked 12.5 percent of the lake's annual safe yield for San Lorenzo Valley in exchange for property the district gave Santa Cruz in the 1950s.

The district bought raw water

for years, until a court squabble over the amount it was legally entitled to prompted officials to look for other ways to supply customers. That situation was fine until the bleak August report was released.

Bill Kocher, director of the city's Water Department, said a preliminary evaluation indicates the city may be willing to provide treated water, but with some concessions:

- The San Lorenzo Valley district is entitled to about 102 millions gallons of raw water a year from Loch Lomond. Treated water, however, carries a higher value, which may mean the city doesn't have to supply that entire amount.

Mueller said the 102 million gallons exactly meets the current needs of the district's customers in that area.

- Kocher wants the SLV district to agree to take less water than it legally deserves during severe drought years.

"Obviously our system is not looking to wheel water out of our district during a drought, we have enough problems at those times," said Kocher. "But if we've got it and we can deliver it and they're willing to pay what it's worth, then there's no problem."

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