

Moratorium hearing set

By BILL AKERS

The next step toward a moratorium on new water connections in a major portion of the mid-Santa Cruz County area was taken by directors of the Soquel Creek County Water District Monday night. After considering a staff report on the water emergency — which cites a 1,400-acre-foot-a-year overdraft of the underground water basin — the directors set a public hearing on the proposed imposition of a connection moratorium and other curbs on water use within the district except for La Selva Beach.

That public hearing will be held Monday, Oct. 20, at 7:30 p.m. at Soquel High School. At that meeting the public will be given an opportunity to study the data which have led to the proposed moratorium, and to argue for or against it.

After taking the public testimony, the directors are expected to adjourn to a special meeting — probably on Monday, Oct. 27 — to decide whether to impose the ban and, if so, when it will be effective. There is little question at this point the moratorium will be imposed, for this is the direction the district has been moving since it learned over a year ago that more water is being taken out of the underground basin each year than is "safe." Allowing the overdraft to go on unchecked, a staff report states, "will result in the degradation of the basin by seawater intrusion."

And once the issue of the moratorium is decided, the directors must decide what the cut-off date for connections will be. This is the decision that has developers of projects now in the works worried.

While the board could pick an arbitrary date for the ban to go into effect, thereby stopping all connections immediately, it is not likely they will do so.

What is more probable is that they will issue water permits to all applicants who have a building permit issued under Measure J for 1980; or to extend it to all who will obtain permits under Measure J in 1981.

In the first case, the

projects for which permits have been issued would increase the district's total water connections from 10,567 to an estimated 10,900. If the 1981 deadline is chosen, this would make the total number of connections rise to about 11,203.

The moratorium will remain in effect until the district has solid plans, backed by adequate financing, for development of an alternate source of water. At present, these plans center on building a diversion dam on Soquel Creek to capture winter surplus water. This project will cost \$6 to \$7 million and take up to five years to build.

Monday night, Engineer-manager Robert Johnson suggested that water connection fees be raised to \$3,000 to \$3,500 to raise money for this project.

Johnson also revealed that once the moratorium is in effect and the diversion dam project on its way, the city of Santa Cruz will be willing to sell the district surplus water during the winter months to help ease the overdraft.

Monday night, while considering the moratorium, directors were also put in the position of having to approve several more projects for water service which, if built and if they get water, would amount to another 800 units.

While at first inclined to put off acting on the applications until after the public hearing on Oct. 20, directors were reminded that the moratorium is not now in effect and that the applicants had fulfilled all the district's application requirements.

And they listened to two of the developers, Richard Monterosso and Rob Marani, plead their cases. Monterosso said his 12-unit Apple Acres lot subdivision project in Capitola is stalled before the Coastal Commission because he doesn't have a water permit. He pleaded with the directors to authorize an agreement even though he knows he might never get the water, so that he could get over the Coastal Commission hurdle.

Marani, who's 45-unit Summer Woods lot subdivision project in Aptos is similarly stalled, made

essentially the same plea.

After lengthy deliberation, the directors authorized water service agreements for these projects and two others, the 28-unit Rancho Cabrillo project on Soquel Drive and the 10-unit Willowbrook Lane townhouse project.

They also "accepted for service" three other projects: Wingspread Beach, 674 units on the Porter Sesnon property; the 18-unit Park Pacific project and the 14-unit Estates Drive townhouse project. The developers of these projects will get letters stating they will be served if the water is available when they are built. This action enables the developers to start their projects through the county's planning mill.

In his water emergency report to the board, Johnson told how all of the district except La Selva Beach gets

its water from the underground Purisma formation, which is being overdrafted to the tune of 1,600 acre feet a year.

La Selva Beach gets its water from a separate aquifer, the Aromas Red Sands formation, which is not being overdrafted, hence, it will be exempted from a moratorium. But La Selva Beach is not exactly water rich, it was explained Monday night. The annual take from that formation is about 1,500 acre feet a year, while the "safe" annual yield is only 1,700 acre feet.

The overdraft in the Purisma formation, Johnson said in his memo, will lead to salt water intrusion if not checked. (It has already been detected in shallow wells in the New Brighton Beach area.)

"Therefore," Johnson wrote, "action must begin now to alleviate that overdraft."

The action he recommended to his board was the moratorium, along with an aggressive public relations program to educate the public "on the proper use of water," and restricting the use of water to "essential uses only." Essential uses were defined as "human consumption, sanitation and preservation of plants and animals."

Uses which would be forbidden included washing sidewalks and driveways, washing exteriors of homes and buildings, ornamental fountains, using water from hydrants for construction, flushing sewers, fire drills or testing fire hydrants, filling swimming pools not built before the moratorium, hosing off vehicles and trailers and other wasteful practices.

A warning would be given on the first offense, and the water shut off for 24 hours for a second offense.

Johnson also called for the establishment of a Groundwater Basin Management District which will give the district the power to control all pumping from the basin, not just its own. As it is, the district has no control over how much water people take from private wells.

It was stated Monday night that if a moratorium goes in, the larger developers are likely to drill their own wells if they can't get water from the district. If this is done, the district's efforts to control the overdraft will be to no avail.

Johnson and district counsel Robert Bosso reported on a meeting of managers from the five county water districts and water officials from the cities of Santa Cruz and Watsonville, at which a groundwater basin management plan was discussed.

The group decided to hire a lawyer to draft legislation needed to establish such a district, and plans for an umbrella organization that would administer it. The group expects to have a bill introduced at the next session of the state Legislature. Bosso recommended that all parties concerned draw up a Joint Powers Agreement that would enable them to work together to get the legislation passed.

Copies of Johnson's lengthy Water Emergency 1980 memo will be passed out at the Oct. 20 public hearing, and are also available at the district office.

REFERENCE

GREEN SHEET
October 8, 1980