

2/13/83 Sentinel

State panel recommends funding for SV water pollution study

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SACRAMENTO — Funding for a study of nitrate pollution in the Scotts Valley groundwater basin has been given a top priority by a task force making recommendations to the State Water Resources Control Board.

The Scotts Valley Groundwater Basin Nitrate Pollution Study was chosen number one by the task force from a list of 120 projects competing for state money.

The task force recommended the study be funded for \$108,000. That's \$11,000 less than what had been requested by the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments, which submitted the application on behalf of two water districts and the city of Scotts Valley.

The project was proposed by the San Lorenzo Valley Water District, which received support from the city and the Scotts Valley Water District.

County supervisors had also supported the study.

Approval of the task force recommendation has yet to come from the state board.

Task force recommendations were not so favorable to the funding of a septic tank management program for the San Lorenzo Valley. This program is part of a long range effort to solve sewage problems in the San Lorenzo River valley.

The program called for new standards on septic tanks at new construction and

remodeling sites. Septic tanks would be inspected to be sure they are in good repair. The program would be designed to address the cumulative impacts additional septic tanks have on the valley environment, where, a few years ago, the river was classified as one of the dirtiest in the state.

The task force gave funding for this project a low priority, said Supervisors Chairman Joe Cucchiara.

This is ironic since state and regional water quality officials have already ordered such a management program be implemented.

Cucchiara said the program's position in the competition for funding, as it stands now, means no funding.

The Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments has requested \$92,000 for this project on behalf of the San Lorenzo Valley and Lompico Water Districts and the county.

Cucchiara said the program rated so low because the task force members were confused about what they were being asked to fund.

Cucchiara said the task force confused the septic tank management program with another project planned for mini-sewer systems throughout the valley.

Cucchiara said county officials would meet with task force members to try to straighten out the confusion this week with assistance from State Sen. Henry Mello, D-Watsonville, and Assemblyman Sam Farr, D-Carmel Valley.

If the septic tank management program is not funded, Cucchiara said "it would be difficult" to locally finance the program and thus, it would be hard to follow the orders of the state and regional boards.

In a memo, state board staffmember Ray Dunham states the regional board adopted a sanitation clean up and abatement order for the San Lorenzo Valley but "failed to enforce it because its purpose was really a device to get priority for funding."

Also, said Dunham, "the San Lorenzo Valley Water District was authorized special powers by the legislature to take action to correct problems, but it has not done so."

Water District Manager Ed Steffani calls the memo "nonsense."

"It appears to have been written by someone who has been on the moon for three years," said Steffani. "I would say he did not know what he was talking about when he wrote it."

The memo also states there "seem(s) to be a lack of motivation on the part of local agencies and the regional board" to take action on the septic problems.

"Holy Toledo! Of all the areas within the state fighting wastewater problems, this area probably has the most local attention," said Steffani.

Dunham wrote, "The general feeling in the San Lorenzo/Santa Cruz area is that it is futile to do anything unless the (mini-sewers) project is given a go ahead."

Steffani again said that's "nonsense."