

Pajaro water source waning

The underground water source in the Pajaro Valley is in a critical state as more water is being taken out than is being returned, according to a majority of county supervisors.

In a 3-2 vote Tuesday, supervisors adopted a county position on which groundwater basins locally are in a state of "critical overdraft."

The position, backed by Supervisors' Chairman Robley Levy and Supervisors Joe Cucchiara and Gary Patton, will be presented to state officials at a public hearing Thursday beginning at 7:30 p.m. in the Watsonville City Council Chambers.

Supervisors Dan Forbus and E. Wayne Moore Jr. objected to the board's adopted stance.

Officials from the state Department of Water Resources will hold the hearing Thursday to determine if they were correct in designating the Santa Cruz-Pajaro Basin in a report as being in "critical overdraft."

This basin, as delineated by the state, stretches from the city of Santa Cruz south into Monterey County and includes the Soquel-Aptos groundwater basin.

The majority of supervisors is not keen about the state linking the Soquel-Aptos and Pajaro basins.

From a practical management standpoint, supervisors stated in their position, these two basins operate as "functionally separate."

Supervisors will inform state officials that studies are now under way to determine whether the Soquel-Aptos basin is in a state of "critical overdraft."

They further will ask the state not to make any changes to the designation that the Santa Cruz-Pajaro basin is in "critical overdraft" until studies on the Pajaro basin are completed, including those being done by the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments and the U.S. Geological Survey.

Levy will write the state Department of Water Resources of the board's position and Patton will attend the hearing to inform state officials of the board's concerns. Members of the county Planning Department also were directed by supervisors to attend.

The designation that the Santa Cruz-Pajaro basin is in "critical overdraft" was made by the state in January 1980 in a report entitled "Bulletin 118-80 Groundwater Basins in California."

The report labeled 11 groundwater basins in the state as being in "critical overdraft." These 11 basins also appear in Proposition 13 on the Nov. 2 ballot.