

Seawater seeps further into PV ground supply

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WATSONVILLE — "Significant" increases in the amount of seawater moving into the underground water supply is threatening the Pajaro Valley's groundwater basin.

Water consultant Joe Scalmanini told the Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency board Wednesday night that drastic measures are needed to halt the advancement of seawater underground.

Those measures range from significantly reducing the amount of water being pumped from the basin to finding supplemental sources of water.

"Vast amounts of valuable farmland all along the coast will be in jeopardy in the future, and there may eventually be threats to other water areas within the valley," said Agency General Manager Mike Armstrong.

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The source of concern is recent water quality samples and water level readings that show that seawater intrusion and basin-wide overdraft are increasing at an accelerated pace, Scalmanini said. "Water levels are declining and measures of salt are increasing," he said.

It has long been known that seawater intrusion comes as a result of a drop in water levels in the Pajaro Valley groundwater basin. Groundwater levels have dropped an average of 4-6 feet in the past year, according to Armstrong. Saltwater from the ocean is then drawn into the formation to fill the loss.

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Tests show that underground water levels had risen slightly this past winter, but — despite the onslaught of rains in March — began dropping again last month as farmers started pumping irrigation water again.

The Water Board approved the construction of two additional monitoring wells to keep a close

watch on the situation. Those wells would cost \$60,000 and be located near Elkhorn Slough and Monterey Bay Academy on San Andreas Road.

Five other monitoring wells are already in place to measure water levels in the shallow, middle and deep underground aquifers. The wells also indicate how much water can safely be pumped from

aquifers without threatening the basin.

The Water Board, which has jurisdiction over 150 miles in south Santa Cruz County, also has been attempting to get an accurate reading of how much water is being pumped from the basin by private well owners. In February, it approved a controversial ordinance that requires the estimated 2,000

well owners in the area to register their wells this summer. A companion ordinance requires large agricultural growers to report the amount of water they use.

Finding future sources of supplemental water is another alternative directors are pursuing. Transporting surface water from San Felipe Reservoir near Los Banos has long been discussed.

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