

# Weary SLV water board tries again

By LAURIE SLOTHOWER

Sentinel Staff Writer

**BOULDER CREEK** — Faced with the teary-eyed pleas of San Lorenzo Valley residents, threats from the Regional Water Quality Control Board, and their own weariness, directors of the San Lorenzo Valley Water District Board of Directors reversed themselves Monday night and voted to study the option of transporting sewage to either Santa Cruz or Scotts Valley.

The board decided unanimously — after heated discussion — to look into the cost-effectiveness of transporting effluent via an ocean outfall line, at the same time voting to study Acting Water District Manager Al Haynes' proposal to reconsider land treatment.

In doing so the board not only reversed a decision they had made Dec. 9, but reversed a decision on a similar motion made 20 minutes earlier in the meeting.

The action came as yet another two-step in the board's attempts to agree on one proposal in time to meet a September, 1984 deadline for \$30 million in state and federal grants.

Only last week the board had gone on record as opposing a sewer outfall line as a solution to sewage problems in the San Lorenzo Valley. And land treatment via collector sites in the valley — known as "tertiary treatment" or "spray irrigation" — was abandoned months ago because of reports which indicated soils could not handle the amount of wastewater generated.

Last week, water board representatives met with members of the Regional Water Quality Control Board to ask for permission to pump treated sewage into the San Lorenzo River, the so-called direct stream discharge option. The regional board board said no, putting the water board back at square one.

Monday night, Haynes wanted the water board to study tertiary treatment based on new soils information, and to reduce the number of houses in the Class I area — the most-polluted area of the valley.

But Kenneth Jones, executive officer of the Regional Water Quality Control Board, told the board point-blank that if they did not at least consider hooking up to Santa

Cruz, they would not get their money.

"As long as this project is alive, we're going to be asking you: Why didn't you hook up into Santa Cruz? So far, the answers that you have given us are unacceptable," Jones said.

"You've foreclosed your engineers from looking at that proposal ... (and) you've cancelled any chance of getting a grant."

Roger Briggs, also of the state Regional Water Quality Control Board also warned directors if they don't have a project ready in one or two weeks, their situation will be "really critical."

Directors are growing more and more frantic as the deadline approaches for funding and they are faced with making a decision that will affect the health of San Lorenzo Valley residents for the next 20 years.

The federal grants will help pay for 87 percent of the cost of constructing a sewer project.

At Monday night's meeting board members voted twice on the issue of an ocean outfall. The first time, directors Mary Kelly, Dexter Ahlgren and Judy Fowler voted not to reconsider the idea.

Ahlgren followed with a suggestion that Haynes investigate the option of land treatment in King's Creek and acreage south of Felton. Additional studies would take four to six weeks.

At this point chairman Fred Nitz — a longtime supporter of the sewer solution — threw his hands up in exasperation.

"We are past the point where we can study anything and make the deadline ... we are facing charges of malfeasance of duty and I don't want to be a part of it ... we've got serious problems here," he said.

"I feel sorriest for the residents of Felton, who aren't part of our district but who are affected by this. They can't take part in a recall election, but the rest of the Valley can. I regret that I was part and parcel to any of this."

Members of the audience yelled "Find the courage to do the right thing," and "You ought to be ashamed of yourselves."

The three changed their votes after hearing threats from the Regional Water Quality Control Board and assurances from water board engineers that they could get enough information on the feasibility of an ocean outfall line.

Both of the alternatives have problems.

County Counsel Dwight Herr has told the water district that an ocean outfall line would require a General Plan Amendment and approval of the Coastal Commission. The earliest these approvals could be granted would be November of 1984, Herr said.

The state Department of Fish and Game has also said it will not approve a project that damages fish habitats. An ocean outfall line would do just that.

And directors also fear the consequences of building a sewer main along Highway 9. In case of a breakage, raw sewage would be in danger of flowing directly into the river.

Considering land collection and disposal requires more, time-consuming study, and engineers say their initial impression is that the soil in King's Creek and south of Felton just is not suitable.

All agree on one thing: septic pollution poses a serious health threat to the San Lorenzo River. And to do nothing would be a catastrophe.