

✓ WATER SUPPLY

Soquel's drought resistance

By JOHN BESSA
Sentinel correspondent

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SOQUEL — While their neighbors to the north struggle with the burden of limited water resources, the Soquel Creek Water District is sitting pretty — on top of a ground water supply virtually unaffected by the five-year drought, according to district officials.

The district is blessed with being in the right place at the right time. It sits over two underground aquifers that can meet the district's water needs until 2005, said Bill Lovvorn, a spokesman for the district.

The Purisma Basin aquifer and the Aromas Ranch Sands aquifer, the naturally occurring underground reservoirs district wells tap into, replenish themselves naturally with half a year's normal rainfall, Lovvorn said.

Lovvorn said the district, which serves 40,000 customers from 41st Avenue to La Selva Beach, is helping to keep the aquifer working properly, putting wells in the right places, and drawing from them equally.

"We are doing a good job of managing the water," he said.

Farther north, the Santa Cruz Water Department is enjoying the benefits of increased rainfall earlier this year. Its primary source of water is from surface water, the majority of which is stored in Loch Lomond reservoir in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

The reservoir is at 72 percent of its total capacity, according to Bill Kocher, director of the department.

"It looks pretty good this year," Kocher said. "Use is down. That, with rainfall 75 percent of normal, puts us in pretty decent shape now."

But the Santa Cruz Water Department's ability to provide sufficient water to all its 90,000 customers in times of drought in the future is not so clear.

Water Commission officials and Kocher are looking at plans to expand storage capacity to accommodate an expected 7,500 more customers by the year 2005. A study of supply alternatives is expected to be completed in a year, Kocher said, giving the commission a clear view of its options.

Loch Lomond was opened for recreational use in April after being closed since 1987 due to low water levels.

In a normal year, the reservoir is closed between Sept. 15 and March 1, to keep water-tainting use down in the watershed during the rainy season, Chief Ranger Walt Cacace said. After a busy first few months,

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use of the reservoir has returned to normal, he said.

Despite the increase in rainfall over the past drought years, Santa Cruz Water Department's customers are still required to limit their residential watering between 11 a.m. and 6 p.m. any day, according to Toby Goddard of the Santa Cruz Water Commission.

Pavement washing is also restricted. Water use is limited to 6,300 cubic feet for a four-person household, Goddard said. About 95 percent of the department's customers comply with the limit, he added.

Santa Cruz water officials will continue searching for ways to add to their water capacity to prepare for future droughts, Kocher said.

The department has spent about \$500,000

in past searches for underground aquifers, according to Kocher. Nothing significant has been found in the Santa Cruz or North Coast area, he said.

Ground-water aquifers are formed when porous areas of sand, gravel and rock allow water from rainfall in the mountains and foothills. The rainwater seeps into the aquifers, filling up what has been pumped out.

Soquel Creek Water District charges its customers less per unit of water and a lower monthly charge than its surface-water-using neighbor, the Santa Cruz Water Department. A unit of water is equal to 100 cubic feet or 748 gallons of water.

The cost per unit in the Soquel Creek Water District is \$1.30 with a bi-monthly service charge of \$11. Santa Cruz Water Department charges \$1.35 within the city, with a bi-monthly service charge of \$14.40.