

Flood Prevention + Control

# A Soquel Creek Dam—Is It Worth It?

By Wallace Wood

Eight years have passed since flood waters raged down Soquel Creek to damage homes and property.

In the years since 1955, the army corps of engineers has studied the flood problem and has offered an ounce of prevention for the towns of Capitola and Soquel — an earth-fill dam, 260 feet high and 2000 feet long, six miles upstream from the Pacific.

In addition to flood control, the dam would provide 1500 acres of water for recreation and a yearly water supply.

Persons interested in the \$28-million Soquel Creek dam proposal may well be asking themselves, will it be worth it?

The memory of the 1955 flood has stirred the convictions of many persons that flood control is worth it.

And although voters in Capitola and Soquel approved purchase of two private water companies October 15, army engineers say their water supply may not be adequate much beyond 1970.

The recreation aspect is less clear-cut, a matter of desirability rather than necessity.

Economically, the project is practical and even profitable, Army engineers say.

The federal government, if the project is approved, would bear \$16 million of the cost through the flood control act of 1958. The State of Califor-

nia might pay up to \$4 million through the recent Davis-Grunsky bill. The remaining \$8 million would be paid locally.

But federal financing would allow the dam to pay its own way, through the sale of water in the reservoir. With a federal loan, on the \$8 million, there would be no repayment until the water was used for sale. The interest rate, though on the rise, is now less than 3 per cent.

And there are 50 years in which to repay the loan.

In those 50 years, County Supervisor Vincent Locatelli estimates, \$30 million in water can be sold from the reservoir.

Army engineers claim the well would never run dry. With the longest drought on record here as a comparison, the army claims 12,500 acre feet of water yearly can come out of the man-made lake. An acre foot is one acre covered one foot deep with water.

Lt. Col. Robert Allan, district engineer for the army, says the ratio of dam cost to benefits is 1 to 1.6. This means that for every \$100 that goes into the dam, \$160 would come out.

But at a public meeting at Soquel High school last Thursday night, the objections raised by homeowners were not economic alone.

They asked Colonel Allan questions of value and sentiment.

They wanted to know why their homes had to be covered with

acres of water.

"How do you plan to compensate people for the blood, sweat and tears they have put into their homes," one woman asked.

The colonel answered there is no such compensation. He also pointed out the key issue: The people who live there must want the dam.

"If you don't want this now, I'll put it away and forget about it until you call me back," Allan said.

Allan hopes to complete the report on the dam, and the public acceptance of it, by November 15. The county board of supervisors must give tentative approval of the project by then, or Congress will not have a chance to act on it next year, Allan said.

In the end, public opinion may well determine the fate of the dam. Congress must approve it, yes, and then vote money for it. The state must do the same.

And the board of supervisors, acting for the public, will say how little or how much of the project they want.

If the dam is built, homeowner Robert Hays says, "The lives of the people who live there will change drastically."

Some 90,000 people will live in the Santa Cruz area by the year 2000, the army estimates. Up to 1.5 million persons annually might use the recreation area.

This would add to Santa Cruz county's already high status as a resort area.

Is it worth it?

Perhaps no one can say, but growth may force the issue. As lifetime resident John Allred, 79, told the audience at Soquel High school, "I've done a lot of fishing, hunting and climbing here. As far as making this a better place to live, I don't think the dam will do it.

"Still, if my grandchildren can catch fish up there again, it might not be so bad."

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