Santa Cruz water supply adequate through 2005

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The water supply for the Santa Cruz water district — stretching from north of the city through Live Oak to 41st Avenue in Capitola — is sufficient to meet water needs through the year 2005 in non-drought years, a water consultant told city officials at a Water Commission meeting Monday night.

In drought years, which are expected one year of every 10, some water-use restrictions, such as those in use this summer, will be needed.

The consultant, Bill Bardin, is lead engineer for the San Francisco firm of Leedshill-Herkenhoff, which is preparing a $150,000 water study for the city.

Bardin gave the Water Commission an update of the firm's work thus far. The report will not be released until the end of September and will not be before the City Council for final acceptance until October.

City Water Director Bill Kocher said the consultants have estimated the area's water demand will grow to between 4.9 and 5.2 billion gallons per year by the year 2005. Water use is currently about 4.1 billion gallons per year.

Whether or not a new reservoir should be built to get the water district through drought years without restrictions will be up to the City Council, Kocher said.

"That's a policy choice," he said. "If the system performs well in non-drought years, do you build a reservoir? That's a policy decision, not an engineering one."

A new reservoir, Kocher said, would cost $10 million to $15 million.

"The question is, what do we want and what does the community want," he said. "Is the community willing to pay for a reservoir or is it willing to follow some restrictions one year of every 10."

Kocher said the consultant used population forecasts from the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments as well as city and county general plans to make its projections.

The projection for 4.9-billion-gallon use in the year 2005 takes into account a low-growth-rate projection. It factors in a 12,000-student UC-Santa Cruz, growth restrictions in Live Oak and irrigation of 10 percent of the area's greenbelt lands, now preserved under Measure O.

Under the high-growth-rate projection, which estimates a demand for 5.2 billion gallons in the year 2005, the consultant used a UCSC enrollment figure of 15,000 students, the greenbelt lands developed at a density in existence before Measure O and no growth restrictions in Live Oak.