

WATER SUPPLY

More water available for Loch Lomond

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SANTA CRUZ — Thanks to a series of March rainstorms, the City Council on Tuesday was able to amend its water-emergency ordinance to leave more water in Loch Lomond at the end of summer as a hedge against a sixth year of drought.

Water Director Bill Kocher came to the council Tuesday with a proposal to leave 10 more feet of water — 280 million more gallons — in the reservoir at the end of summer. Loch Lomond provides the department's backup water supply for summer

when demand increases and the usual river and stream flows — which provide the daily supply the rest of the year — slow down.

Kocher said daily demand is now running about 8 million to 9 million gallons and is expected to go up to 10 million next month.

When Kocher prepared the original ordinance in February only 9.3 inches of rain had fallen in the watershed that feeds the reservoir in the Santa Cruz Mountains. Kocher had anticipated that the city would have to draw the reservoir down to 520 feet, an even lower level than the worst previous drought year, 1976-77.

That ordinance called for restrictions on

water use to go into effect April 1, which they did. Those restrictions, among other things, limit outdoor watering to every other day and car washing to weekends.

Mandatory water rationing was to have gone into effect May 1.

But then heavy rains began falling at the end of February and throughout March, and while rainfall is still only half of normal, the rainfall total has risen from 9.3 inches to 28 and the level of the reservoir has risen some 15 feet to 554 feet.

Loch Lomond, Kocher said, currently holds about 1.6 billion gallons of water,

meaning that runoff from the March rainfall and pumping from the San Lorenzo River has added 519 million gallons.

Rationing now may be delayed as long as customers continue to observe the restrictions, which are designed to curb consumption by 20 percent, and as long as the draw on Loch Lomond is not expected to leave it at less than 540 feet at the end of the summer.

Kocher said Tuesday that he monitors both figures daily, because as he told the council, the water crisis is not over.