

Santa Cruz will use water as a growth control weapon

By BOB SMITH

The City of Santa Cruz will start using its water supplies as a political weapon to force the County, Capitola and Scotts Valley to slow down growth.

Santa Cruz City Council members Tuesday afternoon told their Water Commissioners and city staff to stop trying to sell surplus water to the Soquel Creek County Water District and other water-short purveyors.

If the City Council doesn't change its mind, the decision could dash the hopes of Soquel Creek water officials that they can temporarily solve part of their current water problems by buying relatively cheap surplus water from the city during the winter months.

The council also indicated during the joint study session that it is no longer willing to provide additional facilities and develop more water for the unincorporated areas served by the city water department.

"The primary thing," said Santa Cruz Mayor Joe Ghio after the meeting, "is that we don't feel a responsibility to provide the necessary urban services to the county, or even a city like Capitola or Scotts Valley, that would require us to put forward tremendous capital expenditures when the city gets no benefits."

The county and the two city governments may find themselves dancing to the tune of Santa Cruz's Measure 0 growth limitation ordinance which is far more restrictive than the county's Measure J.

"The county," said Ghio, is directing new residents into the areas served by us at a rate far greater than mandated by Measure 0.

"Our rate is 1.7 percent and the county is putting three percent into these areas."

"If the county, Scotts Valley and Capitola promote growth rates in excess of what we permit in the city," Ghio added, summing up the sentiment of the seven-member council, "we don't feel any responsibility to provide water to support that kind of growth."

The study session had been called for the Water Commission and the City Council to jointly discuss the water department's 1980-81 budget, its long range capital improvement program, the status of Zayante Dam, and a proposal to reduce water rates.

Reconstruction of the Tait Street Collector on the San Lorenzo River was the only major water project discussed, during the meeting, that received favorable consideration from the council members.

The city now has state licenses to divert 12.2 cubic feet per second of water from the San Lorenzo River. But the existing facilities, dating back as long as 50 years, are out of action several months each year because of storm runoff and sand problems.

The staff is proposing to spend \$880,000 in next year's budget to rebuild the collector into an all-year, Ranney-type system.

A Ranney system is basically a perforated horizontal pipe driven under the sandy bed of a river or stream. The sand is a natural filter for the water as it percolates down to the pipe, where it is pumped either to a treatment plant for additional filtration and chemical treatment, or directly into the water distribution system.

The new collector system would give Santa Cruz more water than it can use in the wet winter months.

Despite the urgings of some city staff members and water commissioners, most of the council Tuesday seemed uninterested in either a joint venture proposal by Soquel Creek to help build the new collector, or in the idea of marketing the surplus water.

Soquel Creek has offered the city \$400,000 to build the system in exchange for a share of the water.

"During the winter," argued Santa Cruz water chief Morris Allen, supporting the idea of selling the surplus winter water, "we don't need the water. So it would be advantageous to us to sell water (to the other agencies) at a price attractive to us."

"During the dry periods, when you need it all, you don't sell any and it is a firm annual yield for the city," Allen added.

"It doesn't work that way," Ghio told Allen and the other council members, remembering the most recent droughts and the reliance the San Lorenzo Valley Water District placed on water from the city-owned Loch Lomond reservoir.

"They will become morally, if not legally, dependent on us," Ghio continued.

And then you have the issue of what's a reasonable charge for the water. "We are being sued by the county over what we think is a reasonable charge for water (in the unincorporated areas)," Councilman Dr. John Mahaney added, referring to the supervisors' lawsuit against the city for doubling the water rates in areas outside the city of Santa Cruz.

Mahaney then wanted to know "if the commission had considered, since we have a growth management system in

the city, of limiting the number of connections outside the city?"

"It could be done," responded Water Commission Chairman Donald R. Haile.

"They (the other water agencies) will only use this commitment as a basis for developing additional housing," Councilman Michael Rotkin added.

"What we really want is the Board of Supervisors to make an agreement on growth," said Councilman Bert Muhly.

"The county should be the lead agency," added Mahaney, "and maybe when they get through with their suit against us, we can talk with them about it."

"But I really want to know what our policies under Measures O and J are," the doctor added. "Once we decide that, then we can talk about water."

"I don't think the water commission should be talking to any other district unless they have restricted growth," Ghio said, getting general agreement from other council members.

"There's more," said Muhly. "We are the major water purveyor in Santa Cruz County, and we should let that be known politically to the other general purpose governments."

"I don't think that our water commission should be acting as a planning agency, but it is high time to let Scotts Valley and the County know that no further water agreements can be made until we have growth management agreements with the County, Capitola and Santa Cruz."

"Someone has to take the initiative," Muhly said, "and who better than the county's largest water purveyor?"

And what about Soquel Creek's \$400,000 offer for a piece of the Tait Street collector?

Ghio said bluntly: "We don't need it. We can do it ourselves."

"It's too important a resource, and we don't want an adjacent district to become dependent upon us," he added.

The council wasn't anxious to act on a suggestion from Councilman Bruce Van Allen that water rates in the system be reduced to give back a \$900,000 surplus now held by the water department.

Most of the money will be used if the Tait Street Collector is rebuilt next year.

And the city seems to be lukewarm and cooling fast towards the possibility of constructing the Zayante Reservoir.

Costs for even an 11,000 acre-foot reservoir, the smallest being considered, are up to \$10 million.