

Water agency debates groundwater emergency

Meeting with SC county supervisors postponed

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WATSONVILLE — County supervisors might not have the power to declare a groundwater emergency without the consent of local water board members, a lawyer told the directors Wednesday night.

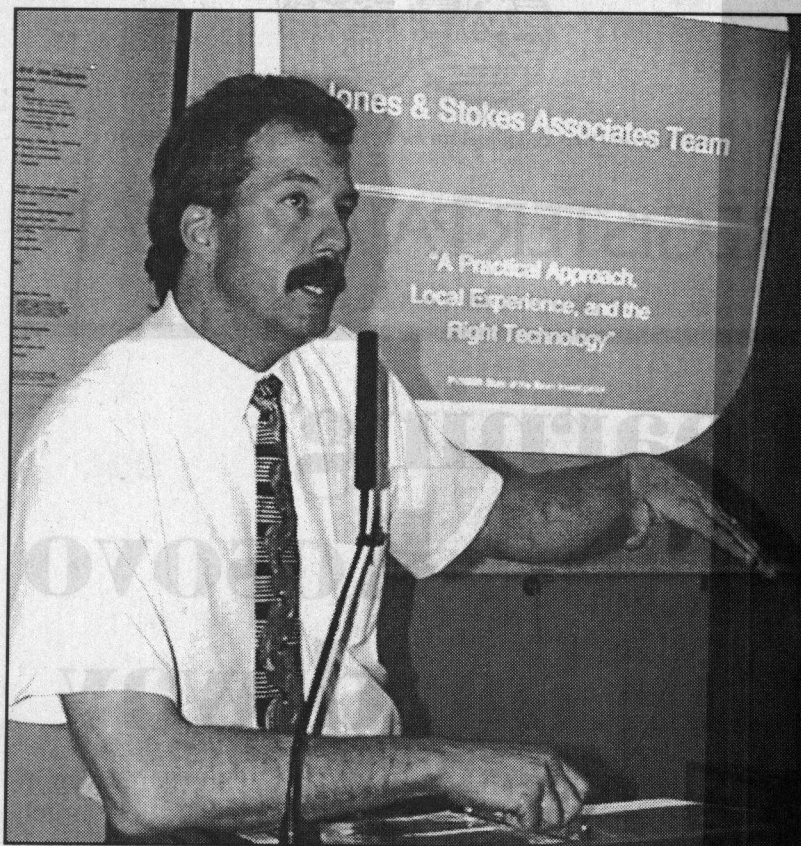
Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency lawyer Steve Mattas told directors that a recent appellate court decision involving a direct conflict between a special district and county supervisors favored the special district.

"If the legislature has already delegated authority to a special district, county can't usurp that with police powers," Mattas said. "The issue of declaring a groundwater emergency would come back to this agency under current case law."

That opinion came as directors prepare for a study session with Santa Cruz County Supervisors in early June. The session — originally scheduled for May 25 — has been postponed in order that the meeting be held in Watsonville. A date for the meeting has not yet been set.

Several directors expressed the opinion that declaring a groundwater emergency might help the agency convince local voters of the need to import water to solve the over-draft problem facing the basin.

"We're now about to embark on a program of public education to try to convince our voters that there's no way to solve the problem in the basin without doing one of two things — importing water or stopping the irrigating of farmland," said



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Jones and Stokes Associates team representative Matt Zidar explains the work his group will do to prepare a state-of-the-basin report for the water agency.

director Howard Mauthe. "To solve the problem you'd have to cut the agricultural water use in half, but how do you do that? I think it's time we study it so the voters are aware what's going to happen if we don't import water."

In other business, directors voted to spend \$130,000 to hire the Jones and Stokes Associates Team to prepare a state of the basin report.

"We have collected a lot of data

... we collect all this data and we haven't had the resources to thoroughly go through all that data," McNiesh said. "This develops the tools for us so we can keep current in the analysis."

McNiesh said the state of the basin represents present conditions of the basin whereas the groundwater model depicts long-term trends. "We have to have these two things go hand in hand," he said.