

Pipeline plan draws protest

But water project called necessary, remains on course

By RAUL HUERTA

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WATSONVILLE — Despite protests from area farmers, a majority of Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency members appeared intent Tuesday on proceeding with plans to build a \$134 million water pipeline.

The 22-mile pipeline, whose cost even a supporter described as "horrendous," would relieve the Pajaro Valley's groundwater overdraft and saltwater intrusion, while assuring indefinite water availability for agriculture, the region's most important industry.

The PVWMA will decide on water user fees — charges that largely would be paid by growers over the next several years — at its meeting June 12, board members decided.

The current proposal calls for annual fee increases of \$20 per acre-foot of water, with a maximum charge of \$250 per acre-foot in future years. The current fee is \$35 per acre-foot.

Bill Jensen was one PVWMA board member who sided with the two-dozen farmers who attended Tuesday's meeting at the University of California's Agricultural Extension office. Jensen argued that the pipeline cost is too high.

"They cannot afford this price, it's far out of their reach," he said about area farmers. "I think we have to stick to local policy with no provisions ... and hold our augmentation fee at \$35."

Applause from the audience answered Jensen's remarks.

Pipeline opponents have suggested use of College Lake for storage and the pumping of Pajaro River water during high flows as options to develop and sustain water supplies. Handling the problem locally

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also means farmers wouldn't be dependent on outside providers for water, they said.

The pipeline would originate at the San Felipe Water Project near Hollister, bringing water to the Pajaro Valley.

Farmers use about 75 percent of PVWMA-supplied water, indicating they would be responsible for 75 percent of the pipeline's costs through continuously increasing fees. At Tuesday's meeting, some said water rates could force them out of business.

Ed Kelly, chairman of the PVWMA board, said he agreed that the pipeline cost was "horrendous." But he said it's necessary to assure adequate water supplies and that costs only will increase if the project is delayed.

"I'd much rather do everything locally, but it can't be done," Kelly added.

Board member Howard Mauthe agreed and cited a 1968 study on water needs for Santa Cruz County. The study determined that the water supply for the Pajaro Valley would have to be supplemented with imported water by the year 2000.

But grower Dick Peixoto said the project would mean obtaining a water under contract with a private company or the government.

"Once you put the pipeline in, you have no local control because you are all subject to exactly what the state and the federal government tell you you can receive ...," he told PVWMA board members.

Peixoto said the PVWMA and the growers should not abandon the pipeline project, but should also begin some projects to increase and sustain local water availability.

The pipeline would utilize 60-inch diameter pipe that would be buried the length of its 22-mile course into the Pajaro Valley. It would require 18 months con-

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