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Water Wars Run Dry

Water Supply

Nine public agencies in Santa Cruz County have agreed to work together in coming up with an answer to the question of matching water needs and resources.

Under an agreement signed Friday at Santa Cruz City Hall, the nine agencies agreed to split the cost of a \$250,000 study on alternative approaches to meeting future water needs in the county. That study will be completed within 18 months and decisions that will determine the approach to water for at least the rest of this century should come shortly after that.

The joint powers approach is expected to save money for all the agencies involved and to avoid the wars of competing water rights that have been prevalent in recent times.

Before the process is through, the old controversy of whether to build the Zayante Dam figures to become the major issue. Despite strong objections in both the City of Santa Cruz and the San Lorenzo Valley, the Zayante Dam has long been proposed as the answer to water supply by the city water department and others.

The project could cost as much as \$50 million and has been questioned by environmentalists concerned about building a dam on an earthquake fault.

Santa Cruz Vice-Mayor John Laird, who serves as chair of the joint powers group, said it is not certain when the question of Zayante Dam will be decided. "You don't kill Zayante until you have something to put in its place," said Laird, who has been among those skeptical of the project. □