

Water Supply

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Water connection moratorium not lifted yet

By BOB SMITH

The Midcounty water connection moratorium will remain in effect for a bit longer.

Threatened with lawsuits if they took action last week, Soquel Creek County Water District directors delayed until Oct. 5 any action on lifting the moratorium.

The board could have adopted an ordinance rescinding the ban last week, but decided not to after hearing protests from audience members — particularly Sierra Club representative David Bockman — that the public had not been given time to review a report on the district's water supply prepared by Joseph Scalmanini of the Davis-based firm of Luhdorff and Scalmanini.

The final written report had been available for public review for only a few hours before last week's meeting.

Bockman said the Sierra Club would have considered legal action against the water district if the board had gone ahead with the rescission of the moratorium ordinance.

The board also postponed until Oct. 5 consideration of a resolution raising the district's water connection fee to more than \$3,100 to pay for a water diversion dam on Soquel Creek and a nearby water treatment plant.

The voluminous Luhdorff and Scalmanini report, which refutes earlier reports on the Midcounty groundwater situation, makes two basic observations and one recommendation to the water board.

While he doesn't supply any firm estimates of his own, Joseph Scalmanini told the board he found no evidence in three earlier reports that there is an overdraft in the Purisima aquifer, nor is there any "concrete" evidence of salt-water intrusion in the coastal Midcounty areas, he said.

Scalmanini also seconded a recommendation by the U.S. Geological Survey that the district drill eight monitoring wells along the Midcounty coastline to gather information on the Purisima's water yield, and also to provide early warnings of salt-water intrusion.

Directors asked Scalmanini to prepare a plan for building and operating the monitor-well network.

Scalmanini estimated the cost of each of wells at approximately \$15,000, making the total price for the network in excess of \$120,000.

The USGS report, prepared under a cooperative \$40,000 agreement with the water district and the city of Santa Cruz, concluded that the Purisima formation, which now supplies all the water for the Midcounty could supply a "safe annual yield" of only 4,400 acre-feet a year, and all pumpers — the water district, Santa Cruz city, and private users — were extracting 5,800 acre-feet a year or more.

USGS officials initially defended the report, prepared by geologist Ken Muir, in the face of strong criticism, but then reversed themselves last spring and told the water district that it should not have used the Muir report as a basis for the water connection moratorium.

During the public hearings last week, Scalmanini

was criticized for not making his own estimate of the Purisima's annual yield — something he said last month he would be able to do with data collected over a comparatively short period of time from the monitoring wells and the district's operating wells.

Audience members also called for an ongoing conservation program in the Midcounty, with district critic Lawrence Frommhagen, who lives outside the water district on Old San Jose Road, suggesting a 60 percent increase in the district's base water rates to force residents to save water.

Some recommended that the water moratorium be lifted immediately. Among them were Jim Warnock, secretary of the Pinetree Lane Water Co., and Brad Macdonald, Santa Cruz Board of Realtors spokesman.

Warnock noted that the Scalmanini report does not estimate the total amount of water in the Purisima aquifer, but added, "The moratorium should be lifted."

Warnock said the district

should continue with its plans to divert water from Soquel Creek "so you can have above-ground water to rely on."

Macdonald called the Muir report "a mistake."

"No one blames you for the action in protecting resources we all share," he added.

"Now the time has come to rectify the mistake, rescind the moratorium and consider cooperation with Santa Cruz in construction of the Zayante Dam."

Bockman urged directors to delay their action. "It is important if you are trying to avoid litigation that the Scalmanini report be (publicly) distributed before adoption of a negative (environmental impact)

declaration."

Bockman said the water district also should look at any possible connection between the reported Pajaro Valley overdraft of the Aromas Red Sands aquifer, and the Scalmanini contention that the same formation in the La Selva Beach-Seascape area is in no danger of overdraft.

Bockman said after the meeting that he planned to ask local hydrologists to review the Scalmanini report.

Frommhagen said the USGS and geologist Richard Thorup, who prepared a report for the Santa Cruz County Builder's Exchange, should also be given the opportunity to comment on Scalmanini's conclusions.

Special sewer rate

Builders of low cost housing for senior citizens in the Midcounty will be getting a break from the Santa Cruz County Sanitation District.

District directors approved a proposal to cut the sewer connection fees for low income senior housing from the present \$900 per unit to just \$100.

The district had been asked in late June by developer Larry Vosti to waive the sewer connection charges completely for senior low income housing but stipulations in the district's 1974 Revenue Bond issue prohibits any form of free service.