

'People keep talking like we're growing really fast, but we're not.'

COUNTY SUPERVISOR ELLEN PIRIE

COUNTY GROWTH AT A CRAWL



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Santa Cruz County's North Coast remains largely undeveloped, as much of the area is park or farmland.

Report: Unincorporated county grew at tiny .41 percent

Growth - City & County

10-2-07

2006 growth rates

CAPITOLA: 0.52 percent,
9,960 total residents.

SANTA CRUZ: 1.45 percent,
57,553 total residents.

SCOTTS VALLEY: 0.45 percent,
11,615 total residents.

WATSONVILLE: 2.47 percent,
51,258 total residents.

**UNINCORPORATED SANTA
CRUZ COUNTY:** .41 percent,
133,739 total residents.

**SANTA CRUZ COUNTY
CUMULATIVELY:** 1.05 percent,
264,125 total residents.

STATE OF CALIFORNIA: 1.26
percent, 37,662,518 total
residents.

SOURCE: Santa Cruz County
Planning Department

By **GENEVIEVE BOOKWALTER**
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

SANTA CRUZ — Want proof that Santa Cruz County's slow-growth policies are having an impact? Residential development in the county's unincorporated area grew by a meager 0.41 percent, or 576 people, last year — less than half as fast as the county as a whole and one-third the rate of the state. And the number of building permits granted in the unincorporated was 88, a drop from 972 applications in 1980.

The figures come in a report released last week by the Santa Cruz County Planning Department, which projects another year of light growth, at 0.5 percent, and a similarly small number of building permits approved.

"In a lot of other parts of the state you find a lot of sprawl, which is going in and developing agricultural land," said Supervisor Neal

Coonerty. In his district, much of the North Coast is now off-limits to development.

"Voters said, 'We don't want to do that here,'" Coonerty said.

The main reasons the county's growth is low is the county's tight water supply and Measure J, growth restrictions approved by voters in 1978.

Measure J limited where and how much development could occur in Santa Cruz County. The initiative restricted tightly packed subdivisions in the San Lorenzo Valley, discouraged farmland development in South County, and set much of the picturesque cliffs north of the North Coast off-limits to the bulldozer. Instead, the measure directed developers to focus on urban areas, like Live Oak, one of the most densely populated areas of the county.

"The growth should be in the cities,"

'(Development) is a very difficult issue in our community because I think there's a lot of people who would just as soon say, "We're done." That's the question. Is that really a realistic planning approach?'

TOM BURNS, COUNTY PLANNING DIRECTOR



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Much of the North Coast has been deemed off-limits to development.

Growth

Continued from Page A1

Supervisor Ellen Pirie said. "They're set up to deal with more population and density."

After the passage of Measure J, growth was initially higher in the 1980s [around 2 percent annually], said county Planning Director Tom Burns,

as developers began building on the 13,000 Measure J-approved parcels. The 3,000 parcels that remain today, said Coonerty, are mainly the least-desirable lots, prompting developers to shy away.

In addition, water in all the main aquifers in the county — the primary sources of drinking water — is either declining, contaminated by seawater or suffering in quality, among other problems, last week's report said,

prodding cities and water districts to discourage development. In the Soquel Creek Water District in Mid-County, for example, builders cannot tap into the water system unless they have retrofitted other, existing customers to offset the water demand their new developments will create.

Planning Director Tom Burns sees a future challenge. Once land marked for development is built out, he said, leaders will have to decide whether to

set aside more properties for building homes, or call an end to it.

"It's a very difficult issue in our community because I think there's a lot of people who would just as soon say, 'We're done,'" Burns said. "That's the question. Is that really a realistic planning approach?"

Contact Genevieve Bookwalter
at gbookwalter@santacruzsentinel.com.