

Supervisors rescind the ban on well-drilling in Midcounty

Following the lead of the Soquel Creek County Water District, the Board of Supervisors voted Tuesday to lift the ban on well-drilling in the water district and the adjacent areas that are served by the same underground water "aquifer."

The board, however, continued the ban on well-drilling in areas within the district where water connections are available.

The action taken Tuesday was "conceptual," and the ordinance lifting the ban will be back before the board on Oct. 20 for final action.

Thus ends a rather bizarre episode touched off by a U.S. Geological Survey report indicating the Purisima aquifer, from which the district draws its water, was "overdrawn" and that intrusion of salt water into the aquifer was occurring in the coastal portions of the district.

The accuracy of the USGS report was challenged by well-drillers and representatives of construction companies, but on the basis of the report,

the water district imposed a moratorium on new hookups last December. Because the water district has no power to ban drilling of wells, it asked the Board of Supervisors to do so.

In April, the board adopted the well-drilling ban, again over the objections of people who questioned the accuracy of the USGS report.

It turned out these objections had substance when the USGS itself backed down in the sense that it would not vouch for the accuracy of the report.

The upshot was the commissioning of a new survey of the water situation by the water district. When that survey indicated there was no evidence of the Purisima aquifer being overdrawn, the actions rescinding the moratorium and well-drilling ban appeared to be inevitable.

But Board Chairman Gary Patton, who is not at all certain that a problem doesn't exist with the water

situation in Midcounty, got the board to go along with him on retaining a well-drilling ban in areas where hookups to the district water system are available.

Patton noted that the drilling of wells is normally prohibited where connections to an existing water district — such as in the city of Santa Cruz — are available. He said that, among other things, this was a public health measure, a sentiment seconded by Environmental Health Director Ray Talley.

Even Supervisor Dan Forbus, one of the supervisors who had opposed the moratorium all along, agreed with that, saying it was also supported by the water district. Only Supervisor E. Wayne Moore Jr., the other opponent of the original ban, opposed any restrictions on the well-drilling.

But Moore joined the other four supervisors in approving the lifting of the ban in all areas where no water connections are available.

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