

# Sewage plans worry farmers

Several farmers at a public hearing Wednesday night said they were concerned that the proposed construction of a sewage pipeline through their property would significantly hamper their farming operations and cost them thousands of dollars.

The rough draft of an environmental impact report (EIR), unveiled at the hearing by consultants for the city's sewage treatment plant project, revealed that farming operations on 17 acres of land would be disrupted for at least six months during the pipeline's construction.

The pipeline would run from the sewage treatment plant to the surf near Pajaro Dunes.

The sewage treatment project, which has evolved over the past eight years, would make several improvements at the 27-year-old facility. Included are the construction of a land pipeline larger than the present one leading to Monterey Bay, and a 4,000-foot extension of the ocean pipeline into the bay. The changes are intended to increase the sewage capacity of the facility and to improve the quality of the bay's

water.

The city's present 50-foot right-of-way, where the present pipeline lies, would be extended another 50 feet to give construction equipment access to the site, according to the proposal. The city would compensate the land owners, but several farmers were concerned that the compensation would not cover all their losses.

Robert Trafton, a farmer with property in the path of the project, said that not only would his artichoke plants be plowed under, but it would take years for the soil to recover.

"The topsoil will be mixed," said Trafton. "Streaks of ground that have been dead many years will be mixed with the topsoil from all the digging. It could be several years before the soil recovers."

Every 420 feet of land that is pulled out of production represents one acre of plants, said Trafton. For every acre not planted, farmers lose well over \$1,000, he said.

According to the plan, two state beaches will probably have to be closed for a few days. While the

new land pipeline is hooked up to the ocean pipeline, the sewage will probably be pumped into the surf at Zumdowski and Sunset beaches, said Harriet Hill, associate with the organization preparing the EIR.

If everything goes as planned, it will take two days to make the hookup, said Ms. Hill. And to make sure it won't take longer than six days, a \$750 fine should be charged to the company making the hookup for every day over the deadline, she recommended. Six million gallons of sewage would be pumped into the ocean per day, she said.

The hookup should be scheduled for the winter months, when few people use the beaches, the report said. The sewage should be stored at the facility as long as possible before dumping, and it should be de-chlorinated before discharge to protect ocean life, it said.

Eleven people attended the public hearing. Assistant Public Works Director David Koch said comments from the public and government agencies would be accepted for 14 days. Then the consultants will modify the rough draft of the EIR to respond to the comments, and the document will be presented to Watsonville's City Council.

The sewage treatment plan, including the EIR, presents ways to increase the capacity of the plant and meet federal and state discharge requirements. The recommended project would cost about \$10.8 million.

Watsonville is in line for a joint state-federal grant covering 87.5 percent of the costs. The local share of expenses would result in a slight increase in waste disposal bills, averaging about 75 cents per month, said project engineer James Kelly.