

# Water hookup ban adopted

By BILL AKERS

It's official — there's now a moratorium on new water connections in a major portion of the Soquel Creek County Water District.

In an action taken Monday night that was as anti-climactic as it was brief, water district directors voted unanimously to adopt an ordinance establishing the connection moratorium in all of the district under which the Purisma formation aquifer lies. The ban does not affect the La Selva Beach area, which gets its water from a different aquifer — the Aromas Red Sands formation.

Nor does the adoption of the ordinance mean there will be no new water connections in the affected area during the coming year. As a matter of fact, there will be about 400 of them, roughly equivalent to the number of new connections the district makes each year. It will not be until 1982 the full effect of the Moratorium will be felt, and it will last until the overdraft of the underground water supply — the reason for the moratorium — is corrected. That could take three to five years.

Monday night's action came at the end of nearly a year of anguished deliberations by the water board, that anguish caused when directors learned, in 1979, they were overdrawing the underground water supply by about 25 percent. The facts were contained in a study done by the U.S. Geodetic Service to update the data contained in a 1968 study of the underground water supply.

Until the resurvey was done, the district operated on the assumption it had a "safe yield" of about 10,000 acre feet of water a year from the underground; it was pumping about 5,600 acre feet a year. The 1979 study concluded that "safe yield" was only about 4,400 acre feet a year, and that if the district continued its overuse of the aquifer, salt

water intrusion would result with serious consequences to the water supply. Some salt water intrusion has already been detected in shallow wells in the Seacliff Beach area.

With the evidence of an overdraft at hand, water officials decided, drastic action was called for. Water consumption had to be cut and new sources of water found. After further new and expensive technical studies and a series of public hearings, the course of action was decided upon. That course of action is partially spelled out in the moratorium ordinance adopted Monday night.

The district had already started work on long-range plans for building a dam on upper Soquel Creek in the Glenwood area, but that dam would not come into being — if it ever does — until sometime after the year 2,000. Nor had it been figured out how it would be paid for, the cost being about \$10 million in today's dollars.

Studies showed that a "diversion" dam on Soquel Creek was a practical approach to the problem of finding new water sources in a hurry. Such a dam would produce enough water to offset the current overdraft. Preliminary planning on this dam is already underway, but it is still three to five years and up to \$8 million away.

The water district hoped to buy surplus winter water from the city of Santa Cruz, but that city council torpedoed that idea until the district adopts the same kind of growth restrictions the city has imposed under its own Measure O. The district and the city are still dickering over the water purchase, but there is no evidence the talks are going anywhere.

The methods of cutting water consumption still open to the district called for a conservation program and a limit on the number of new connections. The new ordinance accomplishes these.

But there are some substantial exceptions to the moratorium. The ordinance allows the following categories of applications for water connections to receive service:

— Applicants within the city of Capitola who had an application for property improvement with the city as of Nov. 10, 1980.

— Applicants for water service who obtain a building permit by Dec. 31, 1981, and who own property for which water storage and transmission fees are paid, and where a water service line on the property existed as of Nov. 10, 1980.

— Applicants for water service for commercial, visitor-serving or other non-residential uses who had applications on file for prop-

erty improvement with the proper government agency as of Nov. 10, 1980.

— All services which were active at any time between formation of the district and Nov. 10, 1980, but which are presently inactive.

— Services which the district gives in exchange for remuneration in the form of property or facilities which the district feels outweighs the burden of any connections granted.

— Applicants for water service on the 1979 building permit allocation list (under Measure J) of Santa Cruz County as of Nov. 10, 1980, and who will have a building permit issued before Dec. 31, 1981.

— All applicants for water service for developments with 19 or more units in the

county who have, before Nov. 10, 1980, approval of a tentative subdivision map and are issued a building permit prior to Dec. 31, 1981.

When all of these exceptions are granted during the coming year, it is expected to amount to between 400 and 500 new connections.

The ordinances also spells out the water uses which are not permitted. These include the washing of sidewalks, driveways and other outdoor surfaces; exterior of dwellings, trailers, mobile homes and other structures; use of fire hydrant water for construction purposes; watering lawns and landscaping in a way that will allow water to run in the street; and other wasteful uses.

Violation of this section of the ordinance could result in a person's water service being cut off.

But this reduction in the use of water also presents a serious problem — the loss of income to the district. Because of its bonded indebtedness to pay for capital improvements, the district must maintain a certain level of income to pay off the bonds and interest.

Monday night, District Manager Robert Johnson reported to the board that a 5 percent reduction in water use will put the district in the red — after expenses and bond payments — by \$63,000 in 1983-84; A 10 percent reduction would create a deficit of \$147,000 by 1982-83; 15 percent, \$233,000 by 1982-83; and 20 percent, \$318,000 deficit by 1982-83.

The remedy for this, Johnson said, is to raise water rates, which the district will do in the coming months.

To head off developers who might want to by-pass the moratorium by drilling their own wells, the district has asked the county government to put restrictions on well drilling. The supervisors referred the request to the Water Advisory Committee, which, in turn, has recommended to the supervisors that well drilling in the Purisma formation be banned until the overdraft is cured. This is expected to come before the Board of Supervisors in January.

This action has angered the Well Drillers Association, and with developers unhappy with all or parts of the moratorium, the likelihood of litigation to test the moratorium is real.

In other action Monday night, directors:

— Agreed to purchase of \$50,000 a 2-acre tank site on Prescott Lane, and agreed to give 12 water connections to the remaining acreage from which the parcel was taken. This is allowable under the just-adopted moratorium ordinance.

GREEN SHEET  
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REFERENCE

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