

# Agencies join in search for water

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SANTA CRUZ — A multi-agency effort to find future water for the north and central areas of the county will reach a milestone in Santa Cruz Friday.

Nine local agencies — city governments and water districts — will sign a \$250,000 contract with a consulting firm to study how much water is on hand, how much is left to be tapped, and how much the area needs for new residents and business.

"It's a unique effort in the state," Councilman John Laird told the Santa Cruz City Council this week.

He said the goal of the joint powers agreement was "to seek environmentally sound water development tied to the rate of growth the people have decided."

In the city and county of Santa Cruz, the electorates have approved growth management plans.

John Mahaney said he sup-

ported the multi-agency effort, but had to question if it would come up with as good an answer as the planned Zayante Creek dam that is now on the shelf.

The dam was shelved after Laird and Councilwoman Mardi Wormhoudt were seated on the council this year and joined with Councilmen Michael Rotkin and Bruce Van Allen to put the plans on hold and take a new approach.

With the cooperation of other agencies, water meetings were held and the joint powers agency formed.

It has had problems with some members — getting them to join, stay in and pay their portions — but Friday will tie the agency together in the contract.

The contract is with Environmental Impact Planning of San Francisco, the same firm that would have done the environmental impact report on Zayante Dam had the council proceeded with it.

"The effect is they will do this instead,"

Laird said, pointing out the San Francisco firm had to compete for the JPA contract.

Agencies involved are the cities of Santa Cruz, Capitola, Scotts Valley, Santa Cruz County, and five water districts. The districts are San Lorenzo Valley, Lompico, Central, Soquel Creek and Scotts Valley.

Laird is Santa Cruz's representative and one of the hardest working members to keep the agency going.

Past approaches to joint water planning has fallen apart because agencies had jealously guarded their areas of authority.

In recent years, droughts and dwindling water supplies, coupled with the inflated costs of water development, have broken down much of resistance to cooperative efforts.

"It will more than just a study and five plans to chose from," Laird said, "It is hoped it will mean a nine-agency effort to develop new water sources."