

Water agency wins delay on deadline

The Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency has won a delay in the deadline for its decision on whether to import water from the San Felipe project.

The deadline for making that decision has been extended from 1990 to two years beyond completion of a feasibility study on the \$50 million project, agency General Manager Craig French said this week.

Also, U.S. Congressman Leon Panetta recently notified the agency as well as the city of Watsonville that he was able to get \$100,000 budgeted for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to use toward the study. The study is actually expected to cost \$300,000, but French said he's been assured the bureau could

do a less intensive but adequate study.

Besides, he pointed out, the deadline for a decision on importing water is now tied to completion of the study.

The reason the agency is considering importing water is that numerous studies in the past 20 years have indicated various degrees of overdraft in the Pajaro Valley's water supply, meaning more water is pumped out of the valley's groundwater basin than is returned. (See story above). An accompanying problem is salt-water intrusion, because water from the ocean tends to move in and replace freshwater as the groundwater table is lowered.

Importation would entail piping water from the San Luis Reservoir to the Pajaro Valley. San Benito and Santa Clara counties bought into the San Felipe project in the 1970s, and are poised to take the annual 20,000 acre-feet of water being reserved for the Pajaro Valley, if the local agency turns down the water or allows its option to expire.

Should the decision be made to invest in the \$50 million water-importation project, the water-management agency would become, for the first time in its short history, a purveyor of water.

—Jennifer Koss