

Will city shut off growth?

Scotts Valley 1990 SJMN 4-2-99

■ **Scotts Valley:** Shortage of water resources dictates that the limit is near.

BY JERRY BUSCH
Special to the Mercury News

In the 33 years since Scotts Valley's incorporation in 1966, many battles have been fought in Santa Cruz County over issues relating to growth and water.

Proposed major dams on Zayante and Soquel creeks have been shot down. The San Felipe project, seen as a solution to groundwater overdraft in the Pajaro Valley, was shelved last year by voter initiative. The city and county of Santa Cruz operate under voter-imposed growth management ordinances.

Through it all, population growth in Scotts Valley has hummed along at a brisk pace, in recent years occurring at 2 percent to 3 percent annually. The frontier settlement that began life as the Hiram D. Scott homestead in 1850 has today reached a population of 10,500.

Now this industrious town —

where computer industry giants such as Seagate and Borland prosper alongside lumberyards, landscape suppliers and real estate offices in an atmosphere of rustic individualism — finds itself poised to become the first city in Santa Cruz County to essentially end growth.

The deeper parts of the aquifer are currently overdrawn.

In a meeting this week Scotts Valley Water District General Manager John Sansing, city Planning Director Laura Kuhn and City Manager Chuck Comstock agreed that the maximum amount of development allowable in the water district, which serves 85 percent of the city, is 15,000 people.

Their analyses were based on population densities and zoning allowed under the general plan. That is about the same population the water district's sole source for drinking water, the Santa Margarita sandstone aquifer, will be able to

See **GROWTH**, Page 4B

Scotts Valley nearing population limit

■ GROWTH

from Page 1B

serve — if carefully managed with new wells to distribute pumping and a wastewater reclamation program for landscaping.

Although Scotts Valley's general plan projects "build-out" by 2005, Kuhn said, "based on the current hot market, we could achieve it sooner than that."

This tight agreement between written plan and physical resource, always the goal of urban planning, is seldom achieved in California. Gerry Meral, director of the Planning and Conservation League, knew of no other city in the state in which water supply limits coinciding with "build-out" dictated an end to growth.

The Bolinas Public Utilities District, water purveyor for a small community north of San Francisco, proved in court that "a community has the right to say when they're out (of water)," Meral said. "But the community there is rabidly anti-growth, and if it wasn't water, it would be something else."

Plentiful supplies

In the Central Valley, cities draw adequate water supplies from rivers and groundwater basins; California's northern sectors have plentiful supplies. On the Monterey Peninsula, where voters have proscribed new dams on the Carmel River, water hookups are limited, but water management agencies there continue to pursue new sources.

Scotts Valley, Meral said, appears to be a "very rare circumstance."

Former Santa Cruz County Supervisor Gary Patton, now director of the Monterey County conserva-

tion group Landwatch, said that Scotts Valley's example — of tidily melding infrastructure with population — is one that more cities would be wise to follow.

"Our policies are not that growth is bad, but that you shouldn't have growth unless you can support it with infrastructure," Patton said. "The typical thing happening with urban sprawl throughout the state is overextending beyond infrastructure."

That includes not just physical infrastructure, such as water, roads and sewage capacity, but social infrastructure, including police, fire, and schools, he said.

Water meters

The Scotts Valley water district has doled out about 550 water meters to various developers and property owners that the district is committed to serving "on demand."

These 550 meters include 156 for the controversial Glenwood housing tract at the north end of town and 150 meters for the Borland parcels along Highway 17. Beyond that, Sansing estimates, the district will ultimately allocate only about 200 more meters, out of which will come any hookups needed by commercial and residential development built on the 15-acre former site of the city's Skypark Airport along Mount Hermon Road.

Although the city's groundwater basin looks balanced on paper, the deeper parts of the aquifer are over-pumped and will not physically be in balance for at least an additional 10 years, thanks to the slow rate at which rain seeps into the aquifer's depths.

The main focus for the water district board these days is deciding how to address the lag time be-

tween having a balanced aquifer on paper and having one in reality.

"That's our next step with the consultant — to have something in the next six months so we can move on with life," Sansing said.

The city's southernmost neighborhoods, Pasatiempo Pines, Hidden Glen, and the Vista Del Lago and Spring Lakes mobile-home parks are served by the San Lorenzo Valley County Water District.