

Water district says ^{Supply} rationing possibility in Santa Cruz by 1989

Mercury
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SANTA CRUZ — Water demand will equal available supplies in the Santa Cruz Water District by 1989 if no new sources of supply are developed before then, according to a report prepared for the city's water commission.

The district, which serves 66,000 customers in and around Santa Cruz, could face water rationing after that point, according to John McGuire, assistant district director.

Santa Cruz City Council members will be asked next week to continue funding background studies for construction of a new dam on Zayante Creek, the major project envisioned by the water district to increase supply.

However the dam probably will not be providing water until 1992 at the earliest, McGuire said.

If population growth within the district goes as projected, he said, "there isn't any other alternative to water rationing to assure supply to new customers."

According to the district report, the yield of water from the Loch Lomond Reservoir on Newell Creek and other sources is 14,000 acre-feet per year. District customers now consume about 11,500 acre-feet per year.

Using the 1.4 percent growth rate permitted under county and city growth-control ordinances, demand would equal supply in 1989, McGuire said.

And, this is later than predrought projections, he added, because people have reduced their daily consumption of water below 1976 levels.

Overall district water use is up since the drought, however.

If predrought consumption levels had continued, McGuire said, there would have been no water for new development after 1982 without rationing.

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McGuire said the supply-demand projections used in the study are reliable because the district does not expect to find any new water sources or to see population growth slowed below the 1.4 percent rate.

"The law says it has to be that," he said. "We assume it will be that. It could be slower, but I doubt there will be any less demand for development around here."

Studies by the U.S. Geological Survey show there are no groundwater supplies available to the district, he said, eliminating the only other potential source of new water besides another dam.

The Zayante Dam would hold 24,000 acre-feet of water, but yield only 3,000 acre-feet a year. That is because the California Department of Fish and Game requires that enough water be released to maintain fish populations downstream.

The district will negotiate with the department to reduce that volume, McGuire said.

McGuire said there are no cost estimates for the dam project yet. Since it is not a flood-control project, federal funds through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers would not be available to help pay for it.

The Santa Cruz Water District is exploring cost-sharing arrangements with other county water districts for the dam, with the water yield to be shared among the various districts.

One of them is the San Lorenzo Valley district, where a moratorium on new water connections was lifted only last month. The San Lorenzo Valley district owns some of the land which the dam would flood, and thus has water rights in the project.

The San Lorenzo Valley district is also exploring the possibility of groundwater recharge to increase its supplies, according to district manager Ed Steffani.

That involves pumping water underground during the rainy season and pumping it out for consumption during the dry months.

The Soquel Water District, which relies on underground sources, is also interested in receiving water from the Zayante Dam project, McGuire said.

The Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors passed an ordinance in 1977 requiring water conservation fixtures on all new construction. The county also requires drought-resistant native plants in some areas. The city of Santa Cruz has no such requirements.