

SOQUEL CREEK

Voluntary cuts on the way for district

Water Supply

By SHANNA MCCORD

smccord@santacruzsentinel.com

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SOQUEL — Residents and businesses from Capitola to La Selva Beach are being asked to voluntarily cut water use 20 percent in response to the statewide drought, though Soquel Creek Water District officials say the conservation effort won't make a dent in the district's ongoing water woes.

The Soquel Creek Water District board voted unanimously at a special meeting Tuesday to implement the voluntary curtailment to support Gov. Jerry Brown's drought declaration last week.

The board also unanimously agreed to hold a public hearing in April to consider declaring a

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groundwater emergency for the district, which is facing seawater intrusion due to the overdrawn aquifers.

The 20 percent voluntary reduction in water use is a warm up for what could come before summer for the district with approximately 25,000 customers.

District leaders, in looking at a possible groundwater emergency, are considering mandatory rationing for customers to force dramatic reductions in water consumption to help replenish

the underground aquifers.

The goal is for individuals to use 53 gallons a day. The average use per person is about 72 gallons a day, which is half of the statewide average, Soquel Creek conservation manager Ron Duncan said.

A 10-minute shower consumes about 15 gallons, Duncan said.

About a third of the district's customers already conserve enough water, he said.

However, the district has had difficulty getting other customers to cut back their water use in dry times. Part of the challenge in asking for the 20 percent curtailment is spreading the word and getting customers to comply,

board members said.

"It's largely ignored," board member Bruce Daniels said.

Last summer, the district called for a 15 percent cut-back and actually saw a 1 percent use drop, Daniels said. In summer 2012, the district asked for a 5 percent reduction and ended up with a 5 percent increase, he said.

Board member Bruce Jaffe pushed the district to seek a 25 percent reduction in water use, saying just following the governor is sending the wrong message to local customers.

"We should be going above what the state's doing," Jaffe said. "I'm concerned if we're

lock step with the state, people will see this as a short-term, temporary problem. We should make people search in their souls for further water curtailment."

Other board members disagreed, and said they'd be satisfied to see water use drop by 20 percent, though it will take a 35 percent reduction to restore the aquifers to normal.

Soquel Creek will hold another special meeting Tuesday at Capitola City Hall to discuss possible water recycling programs.

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