

# Water agency seeks to solve Pajaro's saltwater troubles

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WATSONVILLE — A number of long-term solutions exist to prevent seawater from seeping into the Pajaro Valley aquifer, but all short-term options are "painful," said Mike Armstrong, manager of the Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency.

The 12 options reviewed by the board include:

- Buying of 6,500 acres of coastal agricultural land.
- Severe pumping control throughout the basin.
- A Watsonville reclamation project, treating wastewater to a usable quality, combined with dams for storage.
- A Watsonville reclamation project combined with a coastal intrusion barrier, pumping fresh water into the ground near the coast to keep saltwater from seeping in.
- A desalination plant, to remove salt from ocean water for agricultural use.
- Importing water from dams outside the Pajaro Valley.
- The use of reclaimed water from Santa Cruz and Watsonville.
- The use of reclaimed water from Morgan Hill and Gilroy.
- The use of Monterey Bay regional reclaimed water.
- Importing water from the San Felipe Project, part of the Central Valley Project, and putting it into the basin east of Watsonville.
- Importing San Felipe water but putting it into the basin at the coast some miles away.
- Importing water from the Arroyo Seco project.

The PVWMA intends to provide new sources of water, but because of the time involved in construc-

tion, that water won't be available until at least 2000.

People in the Pajaro Valley, as well as state administrators, want to see immediate solutions to saltwater intrusion, which occurs when more water is pumped out of the ground than is replaced with rain, Armstrong said.

Quick fixes would only delay the flow of saltwater into the groundwater supply, Armstrong said, but still provides the agency time to get long-term projects off the ground.

The short-term options are all "painful," Armstrong said Thursday, because people don't want their use of water restricted.

One of the options is a pipeline leading from wells east of the city of Watsonville to coastal farmland, allowing farmers to ease up on the amount of groundwater taken at the coast, Armstrong said.

A dam on the Pajaro River with a diversion, allowing water to recharge the valley basin is another short-term solution, Armstrong said.

But pumping water from the east only "borrows" water from the Pajaro Valley basin, creating what is called an "overdraft," Armstrong said. Still, that solution would be more readily accepted than others, he said.

Other possible short-term solutions are assigning water allocations for well-owners, raising fees to reduce waste of water and buying agricultural land so that it remains out of production, he said.

"People right now have a mental block," said PVWMA board member Jack Edsberg. "They think what's happening is that we're building a bureaucracy. They don't

see the need. We're trying to eliminate overdraft."

Edsberg's concern about solving the overdraft problem and seawater intrusion also is being voiced by the state Water Rights Division. Ed Anton, chief of the division, has said that the state will step in and decide who gets water and how much if local agencies don't do it themselves.

Armstrong said the state has asked to meet with the Monterey County water agency to hear the solutions to the Salinas Valley's overdraft problem.

Armstrong said he's been told to expect a similar request.

"We'll be in as good a shape as we could be when we meet with the state," Armstrong said.

The agency should have a draft plan for managing the water basin by April.

The 12 options will be narrowed down to one by the board considering factors such as cost, time lines, environmental impacts, flexibility and reliability.

"There are so many factors to consider," said board member Don Bussey. "It will be up to the board to decide, and then up to a vote of the people."

"We have the state breathing down our neck," Edsberg added.

The board will establish fees on the use of water at its meeting Jan. 13. Armstrong has suggested that a set amount be charged for each acre foot.