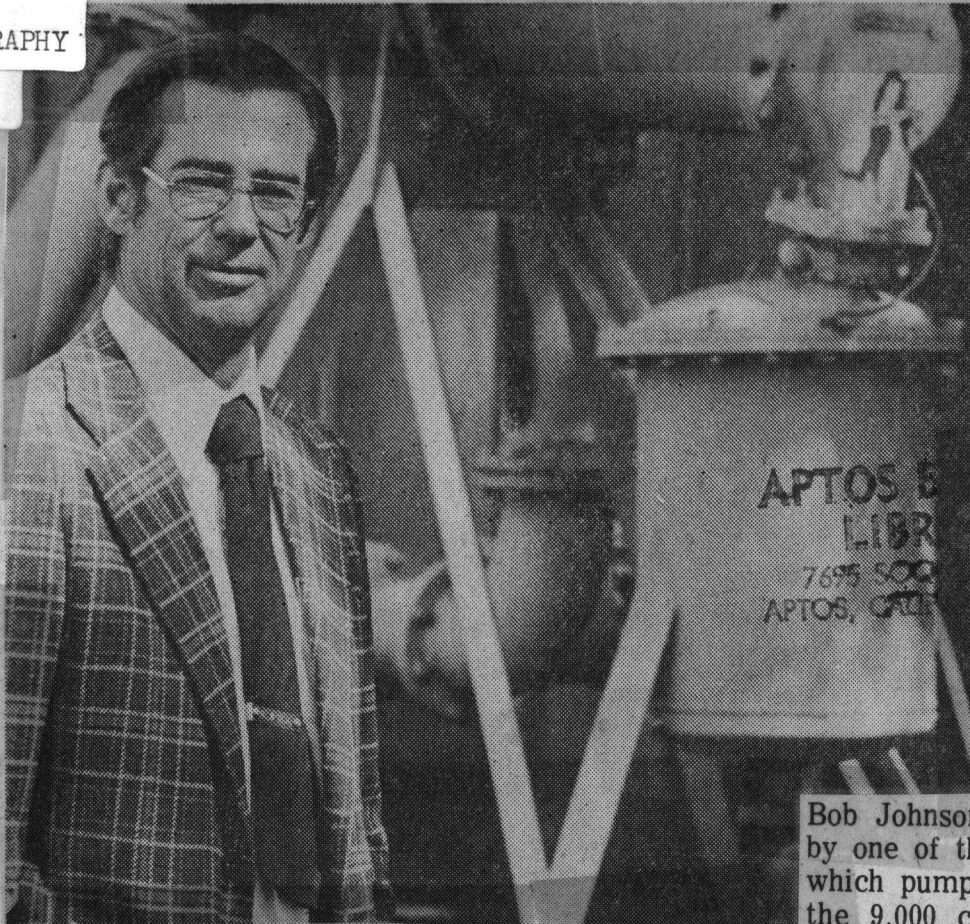


"The Environmental Impact Report originally was intended to provide legislative bodies, who had to make decisions on construction, with all the information they needed — not to decide whether or not the construction should be done," says Bob Johnson, Soquel Creek County Water District Manager.



Bob Johnson is shown by one of the 15 wells which pump water for the 9,000 connections served by the Soquel Creek County Water District.

Let's Go To Work With... Bob Johnson, Water District Manager

By BARBARA BURKLO
Sentinel Staff Writer

The Soquel Creek County Water District sells 750 gallons of water for 43 cents.

"It's the best bargain going," says Bob Johnson, general manager and chief engineer.

The water business just keeps flowing along, with, as Bob says, plenty of ground water supply to last through 1997. The United States Geological Survey did a study in 1968 of the area from Arana Gulch to La Selva Beach, and found that 10,000 acre feet of water could be taken from the ground water basin annually without depleting the source.

The SCCWD and Santa Cruz use the same ground water, with the Soquel agency covering the area from 41st Avenue to La Selva Beach.

Making more than a few waves in the peaceful waters of the district are a number of outside agencies which emerge to directly influence and sometimes dampen the management of SCCWD.

Wading through the list, Bob mentions these: Environmental Protection Agency, Occupational Safety and Health Agency, California Environmental Quality Act, California Resources Agency, Coastal Commission, Local Agency Formation Commission, County Planning Department, Santa Cruz County Department of Public Works, state and local health departments and four area fire districts.

Bob says many of these agencies have cropped up as a direct result of the public's new awareness of the environment, and many are beneficial.

But, on the other side of the stream, Bob says, "People get caught up in their particular concerns and joust with their own little windmills, forgetting the original intent of some of the agencies."

For instance, he says, "The Environmental Impact Report originally was intended to provide legislative bodies, who had to make decisions on construction, with all the information they needed — not to decide whether or not the construction should be done."

"We all have a tendency to waste water," Bob says, and a booklet he gave me offers these saving hints:

Seven gallons or so of water are used each time a toilet is flushed, and there are two ways to cut this down. First, don't use the toilet to flush down things it wasn't meant for, (using the example of using seven gallons of water to flush down a piece of tissue or a tiny

spider); second, reduce the water per flush. Most toilets use more water than is necessary, and work well with less — but the booklet warns not to use a brick in the tank to displace water, because the extra weight might crack the tank. It advises using a plastic soap or laundry bottle instead, making sure they are not placed where they will jam the flushing mechanism. Also, make sure you don't displace so much water that you have to double flush for it to work.

Some people think a shower takes less water than a tub bath, but many spend 10 to 20 minutes in the shower, and at five to ten gallons per minute, it adds up. So, a partially filled tub uses far less than a long shower.

Full loads in dishwashers and washing machines make best use of the many gallons they take, leaks in toilets and other water-using appliances make a serious drain on water supply.

In the garden, water when it is necessary, not on a fixed, rigid schedule.

Bob says there is a direct relationship between power costs and water costs, because of the power-driven pumps at the wells.

"For every seven percent increase in power costs, there is a one cent increase per 100 cubic feet of water," he says.

The SCCWD has 15 active wells at the moment, and another is being drilled in the La Selva Beach area.

Iron manganese in the water has been a problem, and the district now has a consulting firm studying a method of removing this from each well. It would take a period of three years to get to the point where all of the wells would have this equipment, but it would eliminate the iron staining problem which now exists.

Method presently being used is chlorination, which not only kills bacteria but changes the iron manganese to a precipitate, preventing at least some of it from going through the system.

Bob, who has been at his present post since 1969, formerly was assistant director for the Santa Cruz Water District and, prior to that, was with the Alameda County Water District.

He has a civil engineering educational background, and heartily endorses his career as an interesting one for a young man starting out in the working world.

"It's satisfying to provide a service — but it's not like some governmental agencies which just provide a service — we're selling a commodity and distributing it — just like any business."