

Drought '77

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For the first time in the memory of long-time area residents, Soquel Creek has gone dry. Resident Bill Evans put a shovel to the creekbed this morning near Soquel Bridge to show its dehydrated condition. It was reported the creek was dry to about six miles above Soquel. Local

and state officials said it was the hot, dry weather and probable heavy water use that dried the creek. One resident said that now is a good time for the county to clean the creekbed under Soquel Bridge. (Sentinel Photo Bill Lovejoy)

Soquel Creek Has Gone Dry For 'First Time In Memory'

By PAUL BEATTY
Sentinel Staff Writer

Soquel Creek—from about six miles above Soquel to the sea—has gone dry.

It is the first time in the memory of long-time residents of Soquel that the major county stream quit flowing from its headwaters in the Santa Cruz Mountains to the sea.

The stream, which up until a week or so ago was providing steelhead trout to fishermen, became the victim of the drought and suspected heavy water use over the weekend.

Today, its baked streambed extends to Olive Springs, according to reports.

"There is no requirement there be water there all the time for the fish, environmental needs, or esthetics," State Water Engineer David Holtry said this morning, pointing out that "domestic water use has the highest priority and in a dry year a stream can legally be dried."

He said there are from 300 to 400 water rights' users on the creek. Hank

Dodds, Soquel Creek County Water District assistant manager - engineer, said this morning that the district "does not draw from Soquel Creek," but from deep wells elsewhere, and therefore the situation of the creek will not affect the district's water system.

"It has never dried up, not in my memory," Larry Bargetto told the Sentinel this morning, saying his memory "goes back 50 years."

County Watershed Manager Ron Johansen pointed out that a state water rights adjudication had set water rights use by those holding legal rights.

Johansen said the adjudication study was completed to assign water rights "to provide a flowing stream and in a drought year like this, it really shows the importance of established water rights and priorities."

Holtry said that even with established water rights, as long as the water was taken according to priority—with the domestic users having the highest priority over irrigation use—the stream could be drained for human

use.

Ken Izant, a native Santa Cruzan, said the stream had never totally dried in his 60 years in the Soquel area, but pointed out there could be an advantage to the situation.

"The gravel buildup under Soquel Bridge is up three feet above where it should be," he said, "and now is an ideal time for the county to clean it out."

"If they don't—and Fish and Game should have no objections at this time—there will be trouble if we have a heavy winter," Izant said.

Holtry advised that stream area residents should check out the stream to determine if water users were violating their rights, noting that such violation could be an issue for a civil court suit.

Johansen suggested that future plans for the creek could include "a water master" to monitor the creek to see to it water rights are maintained, but Holtry said this would only be done if the area residents would pay for it.