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Disaster Tax Measure Likely To Be On June Election Ballot

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A special disaster tax measure to pay the county's share of \$22.5 million in roadway repair costs from the Jan. 4 storm probably will be on the June primary election ballot in some parts of the county.

Citizens who will vote on the tax will have a chance in March to tell the county Board of Supervisors if they think it's a good idea.

Supervisors Tuesday opened discussion on the tax issue and set the first public hearing for March 2 at 10 a.m. in board chambers.

During opening discussion, the board split on whether all voters in the county's unincorporated area should be asked to tax themselves, or if the tax should be asked only in those areas that suffered major damage in the floods and mudslides.

It was the conservative supervisors, Dan Forbus and Wayne Moore, that advised their liberal colleagues to tax only those who were directly damaged by the storm.

Forbus said, "I think we should consider very closely the boundaries of any tax decision and we should draw the line very carefully."

"I feel that those who had little damage won't vote for a tax increase (and, I don't think the residents of Live Oak and La Selva Beach will get out in droves to support this," Forbus said.

Moore agreed, saying he was sorry that people were that way, but that his experience on the Pajaro Valley Unified School Board had taught him that even though people support something, they're not always willing to pay for it.

Supervisor Gary Patton disagreed, saying, "Maybe we are in this county 'a community' and we should ask the people to tax themselves to put the county back into a semblance of what we were."

"Put it to the compassion of all the county," Patton said in urging that any tax issue be voted on by all unincorporated area residents, the "flatlanders" and the "highlanders" alike.

Moore, who represents the Watsonville area which sustained very little damage, responded, "Speaking for a lot of flatlanders, I tend to sense it's doubly hard to get people to vote for taxes."

"While it's nice to think they will vote that way (to help each other), when it's a matter of the pocketbook, they don't always vote that way," Moore said.

Should the board majority follow advice from Moore and Forbus, it will mean that San Lorenzo Valley and the Soquel area will be asked to carry the additional tax to pay the costs of re-opening the county's roads.

San Lorenzo Valley Supervisor Joe Cucchiara said he also tends to put the issue before the entire unincorporated area (approximately 56 percent of the county) as many persons residing outside the valley go there to use state and community parks.

Under Proposition 13 mandate, any tax increases have to be approved by two-thirds of the voters.

Also, the county cannot add an "ad valorem" type of tax such as is done on regular property tax where the property is charged according to its value.

"Special taxes" are levied now according to a set price per parcel, or according to the frontage area of a parcel along a roadway.

County costs of the \$22.5 million in public road damage could run from \$3 to \$4 million.

County Assessor Robert Petersen says
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Payne, 21, two of 28 young blacks whose deaths during a 22-month period were investigated by a special police task force. No arrests have been made in the 26 other killings.

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that a 1 percent increase over the amount produced by the ad valorem tax in the unincorporated area will bring approximately \$300,000.

If the county wants to raise its \$3 million in one year, it will have to increase present taxes by approximately 10 percent.

That percentage escalates according to the diminished size of the area taxed if the board decides that only residents in damaged areas should vote and pay the tax.