

Money to gush in pipe project

Connecting 41 homes
will cost \$1.4 million

BY PAUL ROGERS
Mercury News Staff Writer

Santa Cruz will spend \$1.4 million next year to install a water pipeline to serve 41 rural homeowners north of the city — an average cost of \$34,146 per connection.

The costly project, which has city leaders frustrated, is the result of tough new federal water standards.

The project — six miles of pipe to be sunk along Highway 1 — is supposed to improve water quality for the 41 homes, which have received drinking water for more than 100 years from Majors Creek, Laguna Creek and Liddell Spring, all just north of Wilder Ranch State Park. Ironically, that water already is among the purest anywhere in Santa Cruz County.

"I couldn't argue with someone who said this is a foolish thing," said Santa Cruz City Water Director Bill Kocher.

"I don't think any of us wanted to spend this kind of money. But we don't have any choice."

Congress amended the Safe Drinking Water Act in 1989, requiring cities to filter surface water from rivers, creeks and streams to remove microscopic parasites such as *Giardia lamblia*. Such organisms can cause stomach cramps and diarrhea.

Tests have not detected harmful levels of the organisms in the northern Santa Cruz County streams, said Kocher. In fact, water from Liddell Spring is almost as pure as bottled water sold in supermarkets, he said.

North coast homes do not have their water filtered.

Currently, it is pumped from the creeks into an existing pipeline, purified through automatic chlorine feeders and sent to the 41 homes.

The city cannot simply drop the 41 homes from its service area to avoid the \$1.4 million upgrading project.

In the late 1800s, water officials signed contracts with landowners giving the city water rights to the three creeks in exchange for a promise to provide water service.

If the city were to cut the landowners off, Kocher said, they could sue and win in court. Not only that, but the creeks are a vital, if little known, resource for city dwellers in Santa Cruz. They provide 20 percent of Santa Cruz's water.

Shutting them off would provide severe water shortages for everybody in town.

"Whatever the rights were, the people up there still have them," said Andy Schiffrin, a member of the Santa Cruz Water Commission. "The city has to honor them. It's very frustrating."

Last week, the city council approved a \$71,000 archaeological study before digging. The pipe is scheduled to be installed beginning next spring.

State officials charged with enforcing federal guidelines have ordered that it be in place by the

See PIPELINE, Page 2B

"I couldn't argue with someone who said this is a foolish thing. I don't think any of us wanted to spend this kind of money. But we don't have any choice."

— Santa Cruz City Water Director Bill Kocher

Santa Cruz to spend \$1.4 million on pipe

PIPELINE
from Page 1B

end of 1994.

Under the new plan, water will be pumped from the three creeks through an existing pipe to city mains on Mission Street. It will then be filtered through Santa Cruz's water treatment plant on Graham Hill Road, and sent back to the city's north coast through the new pipe.

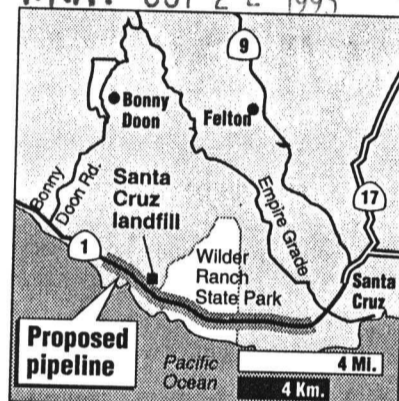
Funding will come from state bond proceeds. The city will repay the money over 20 years, said Kocher, who predicted water

rate increases will not be necessary.

When talk of the project first surfaced, it raised concerns with liberal political leaders that water improvements could lead to a boom in new home building on the north coast, an area they have fought for years to keep undeveloped.

To offset that possibility, the pipeline installed will be 4-inch and 6-inch size. It could accommodate only 37 new homes. The extra water, according to the project's environmental statement, will go instead to Wilder Ranch State Park, which has plans for

M.N. OCT 22 1993



CARL NEIBURGER — MERCURY NEWS

up to 350 campsites but no money now to build them.

A consultant hired by the city did come up with several alternatives. The city could do nothing, which would lead to daily fines from the state. It could build a north coast water treatment plant, but that could open the door for widespread growth. Or it could dig wells for the homes, but that was determined to be too unreliable, given the geologic conditions.

About 20 farms who use water from the creeks for irrigation will continue to use it unfiltered, according to the plan.