

City of SV wants control of water

By JOHN BESSA
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SCOTTS VALLEY — The city of Scotts Valley is pursuing a takeover of the local water district in a move to gain more control over its future water supply.

The region's sole water source, the Santa Margarita groundwater basin is threatened by dropping well levels, chemical contamination and development over recharge zones.

By taking over the Scotts Valley Water District, the city will take the lead in deciding the future of the Santa Margarita groundwater basin. The city is also hoping to fend off outside intervention in the water supply.

"The main value in doing this will be that we have a single decision-making body that deals with land use and resource administration," said City Councilman Mike Shulman. "The city and members of the council are very concerned about our water situation. It's a matter of who's going to take action to rectify the situation."

City officials are hoping if they do become the regulating agency for the aquifer that their control will last.

County officials in the past have pushed for legally binding cooperation among the water and local government agencies that control land and water in the Scotts Valley and San Lorenzo Valley areas. Both re-

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gions use the groundwater supply.

Scotts Valley city and water officials, reluctant to lose control over land-use decisions in their area, have resisted.

But if the groundwater problems continue, county Supervisor Fred Keeley said, the only way to fix them will be by setting up an agency to control the water supply.

"It's my last choice ... but it is a choice," Keeley said.

One such agency controls water supplies on the Monterey Peninsula and in the Pajaro Valley, Keeley said. Such agencies can be created by the state Legislature to set limits as to what areas can be developed and how much water can be pumped out.

The threat of that type of control over the city of Scotts Valley has "lent a sense of urgency for us as a city to move in our own direction," Shulman said.

A city takeover of the water district would require

approval of the Local Agency Formation Commission, or LAFCO. Either agency could apply for the consolidation, said Patrick McCormick, executive officer of the commission.

If a quarter of the registered voters in the city protest the consolidation, it goes to an election, McCormick said.

In a study completed a few years ago, LAFCO supported the idea of the city taking over the water district.

Such a consolidation wouldn't preclude the city from falling under the control of a regional water agency in the future, but it may give Scotts Valley more control in the agency's decisions, Shulman said.

Representatives from the water district and city will be meeting Tuesday to discuss ways of bringing the water district under city control.

A proposal being considered now would make the water district board an advisory group. The City Council would decide water issues.

Since the water district covers a much broader area, all of it would not become a city department. The portion providing water to city residents would be a "subsidiary" district within the existing one.

Jon Sansing, general manager of the water district, said the district doesn't support the merger because it won't save any money.

"The decision is strictly a political one," Sansing said.