

Fish hatchery wells spawn water district concerns

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SCOTTS VALLEY — Both the Scotts Valley and San Lorenzo Valley water districts are concerned that two new wells built by a fish hatchery in the Lockhart Gulch and Lockwood Lane areas may be draining and even polluting both private and public water supplies in the area.

"They seem to have caused a number of private wells to go dry," said San Lorenzo Valley District Manager John Johnson.

"They're withdrawing water from the same aquifer that we're drawing water from and we're unhappy about it," said John Sansing, general man-

ager of the Scotts Valley Water District.

But Roger Haas, owner of Silverking Oceanic Farms, the fish hatchery that began using the wells in February, said he doubts that is the case. "They (the new wells) are a long ways from the wells that have gone dry," Haas said. "I don't think we have anything to do with it."

A news report Friday said that the wells were pumping "about a million gallons of water a day," a charge that Haas emphatically denied. Haas said the wells, along with other wells owned by the company, pump 225 gallons a minute, or 324,000 gallons of water a day.

"We're not pumping any more water now than we were last year or the year before," Haas said. "We

turn some wells on for a while, we turn other wells off."

Still, Johnson said that his water district had received complaints from numerous private well owners who had either run dry or low. Sansing said he had received "two or three" such calls.

Complicating the situation is the fact, which Haas verified, that the water the wells are pumping is at least somewhat polluted with trichloroethylene. That is most like-

ly because the water being drawn has tapped into a plume of contaminated water beneath the Watkins-Johnson property in Scotts Valley.

Watkins-Johnson is pumping and treating contaminated water and discharging it into Bean Creek. Silverking is reportedly discharging the well water that it has used into Bean Creek untreated.

The well water is being used to circulate through the fish hatchery,

where salmon are grown until they are big enough to be transported to the company's Davenport operation, where they are let go to sea. After growing to full size they return to Davenport to spawn and instead find themselves up for sale.

The release of TCE into Bean Creek and into the air at the hatchery is reportedly being investigated by the California Department of Fish and Game and the regional Air Pollution Control District.

Both water districts have asked the county Environmental Health Department to investigate the wells and to develop complete environmental impact reports. Staff at the department has reportedly said that use permits for the wells were issued on the understanding that they would be used as backup wells.

"We just don't want someone else coming in and taking that quantity of water out without us knowing about it," said Sansing.