

Fresh-water solutions for Pajaro Valley promise to be costly

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WATSONVILLE — Describing the problem is easy. Overpumping of the Pajaro Valley's fresh ground water supply has put it in danger of contamination by seawater.

That's problematic because, without any place to store surface water, Pajaro Valley residents and

farmers rely on groundwater to quench their thirst and irrigate their crops.

Unless additional water supplies are found, experts say, the area will not be able to support the existing water users, let alone a growing population.

What's hard is finding cost-effective solutions to one of the

most severe environmental crises facing the Pajaro Valley.

About 65 participants at a panel discussion featuring Sen. Henry Mello, D-Watsonville, and federal, state and local water officials last night attempted to do just that.

After presentations by government representatives and water officials and a question and

answer period that covered everything from environmental issues to state politics, one thing was clear: any option that expands the Pajaro Valley's water supply is going to be costly.

This is especially true for importing water from outside the area into the Pajaro Valley, a key component of a long-term

management plan created by the area's water board.

Building a pipeline to import water from the federal San Felipe Project, part of the large Central Valley Project, or from another water district is expected to cost about \$100 million dollars, according to David McCabe, the general manager of the Pajaro

Valley Water Management Agency.

This cost that will eventually be passed on to water users to the tune of between \$200 to \$500 per acre foot of imported water, according to McCabe.

Yet, doing nothing could also be costly for area residents if seawater

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intrusion ruins their drinking water supply and shuts down one of their most important industries: agriculture. Pajaro Valley farmers use an estimated 80 percent of the area's water.

Roughly 15,100 acres of Pajaro Valley agricultural land would have to be taken out of production for water use to decrease to the level of natural water absorption into the ground, McCabe said. Using an average of \$20,700 gross per acre

REFERENCE

WATSONVILLE
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