

Bold water move by SV

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Scotts Valley - 1990

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SCOTTS VALLEY — A deeply divided City Council took one of its boldest steps yet late Wednesday to protect the Santa Margarita aquifer from overuse.



Miller

On a 3-2 vote, the council passed Vice Mayor Joe Miller's proposal requiring new developments to replace what they take from the aquifer, which is the

city's sole source of water.

Developers could do that by paying a fee to the city for a water-recharge fund, or by creating places within the project where adequate amounts of water could seep back into the aquifer.

Mayor Michael Shulman, who voted against the proposal with Councilman Bart Cavallaro, likened the action to placing a water moratorium on the city. He blamed the "hysterical" rhetoric of some citizens for pushing council members to act.

"There's just an incredible amount of hysteria generated by a small number of people saying the same thing over and over again," said an angry Shulman on Thursday afternoon. "The fact is that hysteria is running the decision-making process."

At issue is whether the Santa Margarita aquifer is in danger from overuse. The annual resource-management report presented by city staff with the help of the water district on Wednesday indicated that Scotts Valley could be fully developed in 2005 and still have enough water.

"The water district has been saying there's no impact (with development so far), and I don't know they're wrong," said Shulman. "The facts all say we're not in overdraft."

Miller said he wasn't swayed by public comments, but by the facts. He believes the city and the water district must find a way to fund recharge projects.

"What I intend is to create a fund, at the very least, like our traffic-impact fund, and that fund will pay for recharging the aquifer," said Miller on Thursday. "The funds will end up going to the water district, and they will find ways to recharge."

Jon Sansing, manager of the Scotts Valley Water District, said the council's action was a move in the right direction.

"I'm not sure just how much land is viable for recharge basins," said Sansing. "(But) at least everyone has to take a look at it now."

The numbers provided by the water district indicate that 82.4 percent of the aquifer's safe yield was pumped in 1993 (safe yield is not the whole water supply, but just that which can be safely pumped without dipping into reserves).

By 2005, that number would jump to 91.3 percent unless recharge projects now being considered are implemented. If completed, those projects would drop the

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total amount pumped in 2005 to 78 percent of the safe yield.

(These numbers include all public and private wells pumping from the aquifer, which stretches throughout the San Lorenzo Valley and into Scotts Valley.)

Sue Roth, president of the Manana Woods Water District, which borders Scotts Valley, was critical of the conclusion that development posed little danger to the aquifer.

"I've lived here since 1976, and I would like to die here," said Roth. "But I don't want to die of thirst."

She ticked off facts on a number of wells in the Scotts Valley area, noting that all have dropped precipitously during the severe drought in the past decade. "And

we've seen no gain from last year's rainfall."

"I do believe we should adopt a little bit slower growth and wait to see what happens," said Roth. "We just should be careful."

Others questioned whether the "safe yield" figure continues to be an accurate gauge because of changes in the aquifer.

Betty Petersen, a Manana Woods resident, said she believes no more than 50 percent of the safe yield should be pumped in any given year. "This aquifer is not just a big, empty saucer filled with water," she said. "Just to put water in one area doesn't mean you can take it out of another."

Shulman said comments like these pushed "some buttons that some council members were sensi-

tive to. ... I think it was poorly thought out. I see it as a decision that was made in a vacuum, which I think happens at 10 (minutes) to 11."

But Miller had the support he needed at the meeting. Council members Peggie Lopez and David Schmidt were eager to take action to protect the water supply.

"If we put it off now, then when would we address it?" asked Lopez when the mayor suggested they delay a decision.

Miller said Thursday that charging developers to supply money for recharge projects "is the thing everybody has had in the back of their minds for a long time. We have to work the details out with the water district. It's not a done deal."