

# Midcounty water district irked by pollution designation

By JENNIFER SASSEEN  
STAFF WRITER

The Soquel Creek Water District is asking U.S. Rep. Leon Panetta for help in getting the Environmental Protection Agency to retract its designation of Soquel and Aptos creeks as polluted.

The water district's board of directors last night authorized seeking Panetta's help in the matter. The district is particularly upset that newspaper stories regarding the EPA list of contaminated waterways have pointed out that the streams are considered some of the most polluted in the country.

Besides Soquel and Aptos creeks, the list includes Monterey Bay, Moss Landing Harbor, the Elkhorn and Watsonville sloughs and the Pajaro and San Lorenzo rivers.

Bob Johnson, general manager of the Soquel water district, said the EPA's list is inaccurate and misleading and has caused "cries of anguish" from several water agencies besides those in Santa

Cruz County, including the city of Marin's and East Bay Municipal Utility District.

Johnson said he has seen copies of newspaper stories on the list hanging in the windows of bottled-water companies.

"It's used for misinformation," Johnson said, "and the public has enough of that going on without adding to it."

Rather than being contaminated, the Aptos and Soquel creeks actually rank high in cleanliness and would have made a state list of "pristine" streams if they did not contain sediment from erosion and grading activities, Johnson said. Since the water district is considering Soquel Creek as a future source of water supply, it wants its customers to know the EPA listing is wrong, he said.

"Our future source of water supply is not Love Canal," said Johnson, referring to the East Coast neighborhood contaminated by toxic wastes.

Johnson said the EPA designations apparently originated

with a report on potentially polluted local streams compiled by the State Water Resources Control Board's Water Quality Division. In that report, the state rated streams as "A" for pristine, "B" for other than pristine but not contaminated and "C" for contaminated. It was that report that rated the Aptos and Soquel creeks as nearly pristine, but containing sediment which relegated them to the "B" category.

The EPA in its designation of polluted streams used the state's list for reference, but combined the "B" and "C" categories, Johnson said. When regional EPA officials were questioned about the designation, they were vague and said they could not state with what contaminants the creeks were supposedly polluted, Johnson said.

The implication was it was up to local agencies to prove their streams were not polluted. So Johnson said the water district decided it was in the best interests of the public to pursue a retraction of the EPA designation.