

SLV officials fear loss of Lompico well water

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SANTA CRUZ — A newly released report indicates a portion of the Lompico aquifer is in danger of going dry, a San Lorenzo Valley water official said.

"In a short year or two, we're all going to be facing up to the music," said Al Haynes, watershed and planning analyst for the San Lorenzo Valley Water District. "We basically have five years to find another water source."

Haynes gave the report this week to the county Planning Commission, which is reviewing the operating permit of the Kaiser Sand and Gravel Co., some of whose wells at the Scotts Valley quarry are pulling water out of the dwindling Lompico aquifer. The others tap into the nearby Santa Margarita aquifer, which is largely governed by the Scotts Valley Water District.

In addition to Kaiser's wells, the southern portion of the Lompico aquifer is being pumped by the Mount Hermon Association, private residents and the San Lorenzo Valley Water District.

The latest information indicates that continued overpumping could cause the southern portion of the Lompico aquifer to run dry in 30 years.

Haynes asked the commission to require Kaiser to meter its well at the Scotts Valley sand quarry to give officials a clear idea how much water is being pumped out of the Lompico aquifer.

Kaiser officials said they would meter the wells if the commission required it. A decision on that issue and others surrounding the quarry is expected Sept. 13.

In a report dated July 28, William Ellis, a groundwater and geol-

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ogy consultant hired by the water district, said water levels in the Lompico aquifer from the Lockwood Lane area of Scotts Valley to the Mount Hermon Association property are not rising despite this year's wet winter.

Despite the rain, water levels have dropped below a layer of shale. That, coupled with the land's slope toward the San Lorenzo River, means that little water is percolating back into the aquifer to replenish what is being pumped out.

Ellis estimated 625 acre-feet of water is being pumped each year, while only 125 acre-feet is being recharged. An acre-foot is the amount of water used by three average families of four in a year.

"Theoretically, at an average annual storage loss of 500 acre-feet, the calculated total remaining developable storage of 15,000 acre-feet would last some 30 years, after which time the aquifer would be effectively depleted in this area," Ellis said.

Ellis' study indicates that the area in question has fractured away from the northern Lompico aquifer, where water levels may not be as stressed and the opportunity for recharge is greater. The fracture blocks recharge seeping into the

southern part from the northern part, Haynes said.

In addition to the seven years of drought that preceded this wet year, Haynes said other changes in pumping are putting pressure on the aquifer.

He said the Mount Hermon Association began drilling wells just three years ago, after abandoning its long-held practice of using water from nearby springs. Haynes said the state's stricter water quality requirements would have forced the association to build expensive treatment plants if it continued to use the springs.

There are a few bright spots, however.

The Scotts Valley Water District is expected to pay \$800,000 to build a new facility at the city's sewer plant that will cleanse wastewater to a higher standard. This water would be sold at a reduced rate for such non-potable uses as watering lawns, landscapes and golf courses, as well as washing sand, which would substantially reduce Kaiser's use of well water.

Kaiser officials said they are eager to use the specially treated water, but they want to make sure the price is fair and the necessary pipeline is available. Scotts Valley officials expect the water to be priced cheaper to get more people to use it.

"From our perspective, what's more important: continuing to have potable water over there that serves us and Mount Hermon, or washing sand?" Haynes asked. "All of us collectively are mining the aquifer to the tune of 500 acre-feet a year. It can continue for awhile, but ultimately we will run out of water."