

# Water board in Catch-22 on pipeline work

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WATSONVILLE — It's a catch-22 of sorts.

Some members of the local water board say they don't want to spend \$400,000 researching possible construction designs for an imported water pipeline before knowing how much the final project would cost.

But one of the main reasons for going ahead with the study is to determine how expensive importing water from the Central Valley would be, other members say.

Further, the study is a key step for the cornerstone project in the Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency's long-range plan to end overpumping of groundwater and eliminate sea water intrusion, they say.

Board director Steve Garrett sums up these concerns succinctly: "It's time to poop or get off the pot," he said after the board met last night.

But for director Bill Jensen, the cost of the study to determine the size, route and cost of the pipeline is prohibitive.

"Before we move too far and approve something like this (feasibility study), I would kind of like to have a ballpark idea of how much it will cost to bring the pipeline to the Pajaro Valley and (begin) water distribution to the public," he said at the meeting.

The project in question calls for building a 60-mile pipeline that would tap into a subsidiary of the Central Valley water project known as the San Felipe Project.

Although the agency has already been promised 20,000 acre-feet of water annually from the CVP, a congressional ban on new CVP contracts until May 1996 has put negotiating a contract on hold.

In spite of the delay, the board has moved ahead on planning the pipeline because imported water from the CVP or another source is crucial to the agency's basin management plan.

Five consulting firms have sub-

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mitted pipeline design proposals since the agency put out the call for them in May, but the board has moved slowly in selecting a firm.

The problem, according to Garrett, is that "no one wants to spend the money to get anything done."

David McCabe, the agency's general manager, said board members are reluctant to spend water user fees without the prospect of creating a new water source in the near future.

"There's understandable frustra-

tion on the part of all the board members inherent to the cost of doing this type of project in this day and age," he said.

Pilot studies for local water recharge projects that promise to provide 15 to 20 percent of the plan's water were completed earlier this summer, he said. But the board needs to complete the pipeline study to see where these projects fit in to their overall plan, he said.

Board chairman Ed Kelly, who said he personally pays over \$45,000 a year in water use fees to the agency for irrigating his strawberry fields, said he felt the money should go "where we get the most

water for our money" — to pipeline construction.

McCabe warned the board that if it does not move forward on the pipeline design project, it will jeopardize the project's chances of being considered for state and federal funds.

"If this agency were to fail to take this next step, you can just about kiss goodbye any chance of getting state or federal help."

He said he and two subcommittees had reviewed five design proposals and interviewed representatives from three of the firms. A summary of the proposal will be available for board members at their next meeting, he said.

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REFERENCE

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