A Soquel Water Moratorium 'May Have To Happen'

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Sentinel
Tuesday, Aug. 19, 1980 —
Santa Cruz—17

Even though the Soquel Creek County Water Board Monday night held off official comment on the second phase feasibility study for surface development, Board President Ken Izant admitted after the meeting that mandatory water conservation and/or a building moratorium appeared to be "something we can't avoid."

Soquel General Manager Bob Johnson, meanwhile, had said that a conservation program and a moratorium on new construction go hand in hand.

Those alternatives are in the limelight because of the district's underground water overdraft. The county Planning Commission and Central Coastal Commission have continued proposed mid-county subdivisions that fall within the district's service area until solutions are found.

The long-awaited feasibility study by consulting engineers James M. Montgomery makes recommendations that include water conservation. Others are development of a groundwater management program, purchase of water from other agencies and surface water development.

Official board comment on the study will be Sept. 3. No action will be taken, however, until a public hearing is held.

The five proposed developments on the board's Monday agenda requesting water service were continued to Oct. 6. Two of those were up for first approval, which would have simply clarified the development was within the district's service area without guaranteeing service. Yet, for the first time, directors even refused this.

Included in the continuation was the 630-unit Wingspread Beach development on the University of California-owned Porter-Sesnon property across Highway 1 from Cabrillo College. Applicants Hare, Brewer and Kelley are proposing an arts and vacation residential center on the 66-acre parcel.

"I just think we can't even give first approval at this point," said Izant later. "There's no use getting their hopes up until we decide what we're going to do about a moratorium."

He termed the building moratorium and water conservation as "looking like something that has to happen." He added, "We just can't keep going how we are. As far as how we go about implementing it, though, is yet to be determined."

Izant questioned the implementation during the meeting, which was attended by more that 60 persons, including Aptos Supervisor Marilyn Lidicoat, her alternate Planning Commissioner Bob McKenzie and Live Oak-Soquel Planning Commissioner Ivan "Skip" Eberly.

General Manager Johnson replied "there's not an easy way to start a moratorium," adding the district will have to look into legal and technical ramifications.

Director Daniel Kriege suggested that concurrent with any moratorium, the district should also look into the possibility of a prohibition of new wells within the district's Purisma foundation where underground water is drawn.

"If we don't limit those who have existing wells to what their pumping now, they will probably begin to increase pumpage," said Kriege.

The district's draw from underground water is approximately 50 percent. The city of Santa Cruz, as well as private residents, also draw from the aquifer.

Bill Bardin, project manager for Montgomery Engineers, and Mark Moser, project engineer, explained their surface diversion facility recommendation. It would involve diverting water from Soquel Creek by building a small dam to create a shallow three to five-foot-deep pond where water may be pumped out.

It is projected to be located downstream near Bridge Street. A water treatment plant would be located nearby and a a raw water pipeline and pump station from the diversion dam to the treatment plant would be required, as well as a treated water pipeline from the plant to Soquel Drive.

Initial phase I costs are estimated to be $7.2 million, excluding the cost of land. First-year operating costs are some $292,000 with an annual average yield of 2,372 acre feet. The facility would operate only November through June and, for purposes of Montgomery's study, would be in operation by 1984.

The subsequent addition of phase II, which includes the Glenwood Dam, would cost $26.69 million. This is broken down to $15.47 million for construction and more than $10 million in operating costs. Yield would be 188,500 acre feet of water at a cost of $142 per acre foot of water.

The alternative provides the district with an "either/or" solution, said Moser. This means the surface diversion facility and treatment plant would be compatible with or without the Glenwood Dam.

At one point, Kriege questioned the yield of the alternative without the subsequent Glenwood Dam. "It (2,400 acre-foot yield) would hardly meet even today's demand," said Kriege. Moser agreed, saying the dam would provide optimum yield.