

Pajaro Valley needs water, study says

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WATSONVILLE — A new report has been issued which categorically affirms the need for the Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency to import water.

The report was commissioned by the water agency as a review of a previous study done last year by Joseph Scalmanini, of the Walnut Creek firm of Luhrdoff and Scalmanini, and completely contradicts the conclusions drawn by Scalmanini.

The water agency will discuss the latest findings at 3 p.m. Wednesday in the Watsonville City Hall council chambers. Water agency chairman Brad Bennett said the water study is sure to be controversial.

Scalmanini had asserted that the agency wouldn't have to import water because the problems, which had been described in previous water reports, were overblown.

He said the "overdraft" of water in the Pajaro Valley was minimal. Overdraft occurs when more water is taken out of the groundwater supply than is replenished. He calculated that only 3,000 acre-feet of water were lost over the past 15 years. An acre-foot is the amount of water needed to cover one acre with one foot of water.

Scalmanini also said the problem of seawater intrusion in wells along the coast, particularly in the north Monterey County-Springfield area, were not as serious as previous reports had indicated.

The conclusions were welcome news for the water agency, which is charged with deciding whether the Pajaro Valley should import water from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's San Felipe Project. The area can receive 19,900 acre-feet of water a year from the San Luis Reservoir near Pacheco Pass if the water is deemed necessary.

While the final cost of the project isn't known, the figure will be above \$40 million — which many consider

prohibitive.

Scalmanini's report surprised the agency board of directors because for years the water studies have indicated serious water problems in the valley. Now, another report has reached the same conclusion.

In his report, issued Jan. 30, John Mann of La Habra, said:

"The overdraft and related problems can be solved by the importation of supplemental water from outside the local watershed. Procedures such as the spreading or injecting of local waters, or pumping from deeper aquifers (water sources) can be used to delay the need for supplemental water, but these must be viewed as expedients and not a final solution to satisfying the present and future demands for water."

Mann said there is "a serious overdraft problem in the area which has resulted over the last 40 years in progressive lowering of water levels, persistent water levels below sea level, and seawater intrusion."

He also described the seawater intrusion problem as "actually worse than has heretofore been depicted" because previous analyses didn't take into account the fact that seawater is more dense than fresh water and will degrade the freshwater supply unless that fresh water is higher than sea level.

Mann used the analogy of a U-shaped tube and said that unless fresh water wells are 5-percent higher than sea level, the denser seawater will push it out, thus creating wells that pump seawater. Along the coast the fresh water levels are at sea level.

Mann also said drilling deeper for water "is not a cure for overdraft." The deeper water sources should be left as storage, and used only occasionally until a more permanent solution can be found.

The deeper water sources can become contaminated when older wells are not properly sealed, he pointed out.