

Midcounty's future water reserves more than ample

By BOB SMITH

A new water study shows the Midcounty has enough groundwater (well water) to meet the Midcounty's present growth rate for a half century or more.

A report for the Soquel Creek Water District by Luhdorff and Scalmanini released this morning by the district shows the underground water basins that now supply all of the area's drinking water are capable of producing three times the amount of water now pumped each year from them without danger of salt water intrusion.

The report is a far cry from the 1980 report by the U.S. Geological Survey that concluded that the district was overpumping the groundwater basin and drawing salt water into the region's drinking water supply.

The district board, as a result, slapped a short-lived water connection ban on the Midcounty. When the USGS conclusions were challenged by building industry officials and finally repudiated by the USGS, the water district hired Luhdorff and Scalmanini to, first, critique the federal report, and

then to begin a 2½ year, half million dollar study of the groundwater basin.

District general manager Robert Johnson said this morning that the district could delay a \$10 million plan to build a small diversion dam near Bargetto's winery to divert winter storm waters from Soquel Creek for drinking water, and to eventually build a large water storage dam on the west branch of Soquel Creek.

The district has been collecting fees of nearly \$4,000 for each new residential unit built in the area for the last two years. That

money has been earmarked for construction of the diversion dam and adjacent water treatment plant in the belief that the district would soon have to supplement its groundwater supplies with surface runoff.

Johnson said it will be up to the district's board members to decide if the connection fees will be reduced or if the district will use the money to accelerate improvements to the water distribution system.

In his report, consultant Joe Scalmanini concluded that the Purisima groundwater formations store 1,375,000 acre-feet of

water, and on an annual basis can produce 12,000-13,000 acre feet of water.

Scalmanini cautioned that the immense amounts of water now stored in the underground basin must be preserved.

"This volume of water does not represent a reservoir which can be mined or depleted over a period of time. Rather, it represents a volume of water in a basin which must be kept 'full'; for if excessive extraction, i.e. overdraft, were to occur without some sort of coastal hydrologic protection, ... seawater intrusion could result and render

parts of the storage unusable."

The district annually pumps 3,500 acre-feet from the formation, Scalmanini said, and other well users in the Midcounty area draw another thousand acre-feet a year.

Johnson said the water district has been growing at an annual rate of 300 new connections a year. Each connection uses approximately 0.4 acre a year. Assuming the same growth rate for the indefinite future, there is enough groundwater for the next 62.5 years.