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USGS Reiterates:

Mid-County Water Supply Overdrafted

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Too much water is being pumped out of the Mid-County underground water basin, the United States Geological Survey re-confirmed this morning.

The reconfirmation came at a special meeting with USGS and local officials to straighten out the federal agency's position on its 1980 report on mid-county's water supply.

A couple of weeks back, USGS Chief Hydrologist Jay P. Akers dropped a bombshell on the county Board of Supervisors when the hydrologist disagreed with a colleague's finding that the water supply was being overdrafted.

Akers told the board that he disputed colleague Ken Muir's finding that the

"safe yield" for the underground supply was 4,400 acre feet. Currently, 5,400 acre feet of water is removed out each year. The result, Muir had said, was that seawater was being pulled into coastal wells.

At today's meeting, three USGS spokesmen reversed Akers's doubtful position and stood behind Muir's findings.

Because of Muir's report, the Soquel Creek County Water District put a ban on new water connections within the district and the county Board of Supervisors banned new well drilling.

The county board is also considering expanding the well ban to include the entire Purisima Formation, an area about twice the size of the district.

However, after listening to Akers, supervisors held over any action to March 17. Today's information from USGS should be persuasive to expand the ban. USGS officials promised to attend the March 17 meeting, as well as Soquel's water board meeting on March 16.

USGS District Chief Richard Bloyd told officials at the special meeting that Muir "knows what he's doing and is a capable person."

He pointed out that Muir's 4,400 acre foot conclusion was based on the "inductive method he used."

Gilbert Bertoldi, USGS hydrologist in charge of the Central Valley Aquifer Project, explained the numerous methods available to make such conclusions, stating the "inductive method" used primarily by Muir used comparisons of measurements of local wells.

Bertoldi, while calling Muir's report "rational," also noted that "out of 600 groundwater reports done in the central valley 'all say something different.'"

He added, "This is so complex that in order to define the data to reach a deductive conclusion, it might take several years; I really feel sorry for you folks to have to make a decision."

Bertoldi said Muir's conclusion could not be based on more detailed information, such as the depth and direction of underground aquifers and impactness of sand and silt, because that information is not available.

"You could probably spend a million dollars on more detailed information, but would it be worth it? No, I don't think so," said Bertoldi.

He recommended instead that Soquel Creek get a "monitoring network" of its coastal wells. Bloyd later agreed to do a "water level contour map" of the area's wells for the district.

Johnson noted later that the district is already monitoring its coastal wells, and will continue to do so.

The USGS report has drawn challenge from the well drilling contractors and a number of development interests.

The 1968 USGS report done by Akers and J. J. Hickey had led the district to believe that it had 10,000 acre feet to draw on, but that came to a sudden halt when the Muir report was issued late last year.

Muir told The Sentinel that he stood by his report and that in taking samples from 30 to 40 wells along the coast he had become convinced that salt water intrusion was occurring. He said it was due to the water being overdrafted from excessive pumping.

REFERENCE

