

Expert says water basins nearly full

By Steve Sullivan
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The Montecito and Toro Canyon Basins are not overdrafted by pumping — on the contrary, they are nearly full, Michael F. Hoover, a local geologist, told Montecito Water District directors yesterday.

Hoover reviewed with the board the conclusions he reached in a safe yield evaluation study the district will use in planning for increased groundwater supplies. The district may allow more water meters to be issued.

Directors Henry Muller and Ambrose Cramer will now meet with Manager C. Charles Evans to come up with recommendations concerning the district's well program for board consideration.

The perennial or safe yield is the amount of water that may be drawn from a basin on an annual basis without depleting the amount of water in storage over the long term. Pumping in the basin is from metered district wells and from unmetered private wells.

Hoover said water levels are presently very high, probably "near historic high levels" — the opposite of what some citizens have been contending. All coastal wells are now above sea level, he said, except one at Santa Barbara Cemetery, which appears to be affected by recent city pumpage.

Assuming that private pumping has superior legal rights, Hoover stated, there remains about 1,000 acre-feet of water available to the district in the basins.

District pumping, which could go as high as 600 acre-feet a year with existing equipment, has recently averaged only 200 acre-feet a year.

Conjunctive use, the practice of overpumping the basins during dry years and refilling with surplus water in wet years, appears feasible in Montecito, Hoover said.

He also recommended an aggressive program of monitoring existing coastal wells and/or the drilling of new coastal observation wells.