

No more hookups allowed

Judge says water too scarce in RV to allow building

By RANDY FOSTER

Journal Staff Writer

REDWOOD VALLEY — A Mendocino County Superior Court judge Wednesday imposed a building moratorium on Redwood Valley because of the area's chronic water situation.

Superior Court Judge James Luther, ruling in favor of a suit filed by a group of Redwood Valley residents, said the Redwood Valley Water District doesn't have enough water but continues to issue new water hookups.

The suit was filed by Mike Sweeney, Oliver Sause and Residents for Adequate Water (RAW) earlier this year in response to threatened water shortages and rationing.

The district has the equivalent of 1,350 water hookups in a system designed to handle 1,800, but Luther said there is evidence the district is far exceeding its legal water entitlements.

"The district lacks a legal water source sufficient to supply adequately, dependably and safely its users' normal needs, let alone their total requirement under maximum demand conditions," he said.

Petitioners in the case were declaring victory this morning, but Bruce Loberg, chair of the Redwood Valley Water District Board of Directors, criticized the ruling.

"Five people just shafted over a thousand families," Loberg said. "Negotiations with Sonoma County (for more water rights) have just gone out the window."

A closed-door emergency session of the district board is expected within days, during which Loberg anticipates a recommendation to appeal Luther's decision, which is tentative and takes effect in 10 days.

In the meantime, the district has stopped issuing water permits, effectively halting construction on several projects only recently approved by the county Board of Supervisors.

Without an effective appeal, Loberg said the district is considering two courses of action — cutting back water services and raising prices to meet financial obligations caused by Luther's decision.

"It's going to get very heated," he said.

David Riemenschneider, attorney representing RAW, disagrees with Loberg's "doom and gloom" predictions.

"What the judge was just saying is that, under present systems, the valley doesn't have a reliably adequate water system," he said.

He said RAW has encouraged other methods for the district to solve its water problems, methods including building a reservoir to catch winter runoff and obtaining other sources of local water.

WATER FIGHT

Redwood Valley hookups halted

By MIKE GENIELLA
Press Democrat Bureau

UKIAH — A Mendocino County judge has imposed a moratorium on new residential service hookups in water-poor Redwood Valley.

Judge James W. Luther's decision was a victory for a tenacious band of valley residents who in early January sued the Redwood Valley Water District because they feared unchecked development threatened to jeopardize their own water supply.

It also was a blow to a majority trio on the county Board of Supervisors, who frequently have approved new housing units in the valley, arguing that the debate over whether there were adequate sources of water was between residents and the valley's water district board.

Water District Manager Keith Tiemann said Thursday the district's Board of Directors will meet soon to discuss the court decision. He said there is only one pending application for water service hookup that might be affected by the ruling.

In his 20-page decision, Luther found that in the event of a drought, the water district's emergency plans would restrict the valley's current 5,000 residents to only 27 gallons a day. That's nearly half of the the state Health Department's standards for basic health needs, Luther said.

District claims that its water supply source is adequate for meet current users' maximum demands "is entirely lacking in evidentiary support," Luther ruled.

Luther also said the state Water Resources Control Board predicts Lake Mendocino, the water district's only supply, "will be lowered faster and to lower levels than have been experienced since 1959 and noted that Redwood Valley has an inadequate water supply source for its developing uses and no feasible source other than Lake Mendocino."

The state department also "recognizes that a shortage in the supply of water in Lake Mendocino could occur before 2000, based on the diversions between Lake Mendocino and Healdsburg having doubled between 1976 and 1987 as well as the significantly increased stream flows out of the lake since April, 1986 due to Fish and Game Department needs."

Redwood Valley's water district actually operates two systems — an agricultural system covering about 3,300 acres of land and a domestic

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water system serving about 5,000 people.

During wet months — Nov. 1 through April 30 — the district is

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