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Santa Ynez River
WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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March 12, 2015

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Board of Supervisors
County of Santa Barbara
105 Anapamu Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

Re: Montecito Water District's Request for County Suspension of New Well Drilling Permits
in its Service Area

Honorable Supervisors:

In a letter dated November 21, 2014 to the County of Santa Barbara (County), the Montecito Water District (MWD) requested the County to suspend new well drilling permits within the MWD service area until MWD's water storage emergency is lifted. MWD also requested the County to require future permitted wells to be equipped with flow metering devices and residents to allow MWD access to wells twice annually to measure static water levels, among other things. The MWD service area overlies a small groundwater basin with a large population and is dependent on importation of surface water supplies. As the drought has worsened and the basin has failed, water users extracting groundwater for irrigation have lost their wells and shifted to MWD supplies for irrigation purposes, exacerbating MWD's supply shortages. Additionally, the combined pumping of MWD and various mutual water companies in Storage Unit 3 primarily for health and safety purposes raises the chances of sea water intrusion, potentially damaging the groundwater basin permanently. Because of its reliance on surface water, the groundwater basin underlying the MWD service area is low priority and is not subject to the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) for management purposes. This urbanized area does not have a city entity that could exercise its police powers to regulate groundwater. The situation appears both unique and dire for MWD in its service area. Action by the County may be the only remedy to resolve the situation there.

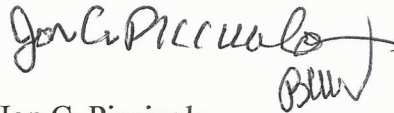
Although the County may have reason to act in the MWD service area, the Santa Ynez River Water Conservation District (SYRWCD) has concerns should the County attempt to take similar actions in the County as a whole, especially in the Santa Ynez Valley. The conditions in the Santa Ynez Valley are drastically different than in the MWD service area. There are multiple, large groundwater basins and a very small population. The three cities in the Valley (Lompoc, Buellton, Solvang) long ago exercised their police powers and regulate groundwater within these urbanized areas. In the unincorporated areas, there are two community service districts, one water district and several mutual water companies that serve as water purveyors. Mission Hills CSD recently completed a replacement well, Vandenberg Village CSD is planning three replacement wells and the issue with the new water quality standard for Chromium 6 may cause additional well drilling to mitigate that situation near Santa Ynez. None of these water purveyors have seen an increase in private water wells failing and their users shifting to public supplies for irrigation use. The situation here with regard to available supplies for health and safety purposes is very different than in the MWD service area.

The Santa Ynez Valley derives its water supplies from both the underflow of the Santa Ynez River (water flowing in a known and defined channel) and prevailing groundwater in the Uplands and on the Lompoc Plain. The river underflow is already regulated by the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB), meters are required by that Board, and groundwater production is reported to both the SWRCB and the SYRWCD. Additionally, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation has a detailed monitoring program wherein wells along the river and in part of the Lompoc Plain are monitored monthly and the reports made available to all users. The SYRWCD has required, for the last 37 years, that groundwater wells be registered on both the river alluvium, the Uplands and the Lompoc Plain, and that production be reported to the District twice each year. In addition, the District uses the approved CASGEM groundwater monitoring program conducted by the County to analyze, track and report groundwater storage in each basin. In the Lompoc area basins, SYRWCD has managed for over 26 years a jointly funded, very detailed USGS monitoring program of water levels and water quality by level there. That information was used recently by the City of Lompoc to develop and implement a groundwater management plan. Sometime ago, SYRWCD and the City of Buellton developed a groundwater management plan for the Buellton Upland Basin. Because of their high reliance on groundwater, the Santa Ynez River groundwater basins are subject to SGMA. Given its long history of tracking groundwater use and groundwater availability, its cooperative efforts with water purveyors in the Valley to monitor and manage groundwater, and its long history of managing groundwater along the Santa Ynez River to provide for downstream water rights releases, SYRWCD is in a good position to implement SGMA with appropriate stakeholders and recently initiated activity in that regard.

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Given the foregoing, it should be abundantly clear that conditions in Montecito and the Santa Ynez Valley are drastically different. Clearly, "one shoe does not fit all" and while the County's activities may be needed in the MWD service area, they are not needed within the SYRWCD's boundaries within the Santa Ynez Valley. Should the County impose the regulations in the Valley similar to those requested by MWD in its service area, it will only increase its risk of animus by local groundwater users and potentially compromise working relationships that likely will be required with regard to future water management planning efforts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jon C. Picciuolo". The signature is stylized and includes a large flourish at the end.

Jon C. Picciuolo
President
SANTA YNEZ RIVER
WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

JCP/jrf

Copy: Board of Directors
Larry Fay, County Environmental Health Services
Tom Fayram, County Water Agency
Michael Ghizzoni, County Counsel
Chris Dahlstrom, SYRWCD-ID No. 1
Brad Vidro, City of Solvang
Marc Bierdzinski, City of Buellton
Larry Bean, City of Lompoc
Joe Barget, Vandenberg Village CSD
Mike Riley, Mission Hills CSD
Tom Mosby, Montecito Water District
County Farm Bureau