

Water

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ation. He favored entirely scrapping the retrofit law and allowing developers to pay now for state water.

The council followed the commission recommendation — giving developers a choice between retrofitting or paying for state water.

Ashcraft said Pismo Beach could keep growing at the 2.4 percent rate it has since 1984 without overcommitting the water supply it now has.

The city has about 300 acre-feet of water in reserve out of its total supply, Ashcraft said. He predicted that state water should be here before the extra water is used up.

And if state water is delayed or if the city loses Lopez Lake for awhile due to repairs, he said, the city could pump more ground water.

Lopez, which supplies 40 percent of the city's water, could be drained for 18 months to fix a possible earthquake problem.

Ashcraft's optimism bothered Tom Krasner, chairman of the Public Works Commission.

"We're playing Russian roulette with our water supply," Krasner said. "We're going to come dangerously close to running out of water again."

In 1989, Pismo Beach had committed almost all the water it had. That led the council to pass the retrofit law.

The ordinance allowed developers to build if they installed low-flow water devices in existing homes. The devices are supposed to cut water use by 1½ times the amount the new

development would use.

Mayor Tim Bittner suggested that the retrofit law by itself might have reached the limit of its effectiveness.

One-third of the homes in the city have been retrofitted and another third were built after the state building code was changed to make low-flow toilets a standard requirements.

Before 1984, toilets could flush 7 gallons. Homes built after that had to meet the current standard, 3½-gallon toilets. Several attempts have been made to make ultra low-flow mandatory, but developers have resisted dropping to 1½-gallon toilets.

"We're pushing the limit," Bittner said about finding more homes to retrofit. He also suggested that the effect of the retrofit law is hard to measure.

The drop in city water use could be a result of higher water costs, he said. "A few astronomical water bills and a brown lawn doesn't seem so bad."

Councilman Jim Maroney partially agreed with Bittner. Maroney reported hearing from developers who are hiring people to call homes in the city asking if they have any toilets to replace.

John Martin, representing the Michael Towbes Construction firm that will build the 148,000-square-foot Factory Outlet on Five Cities Drive, explained the problem Tuesday.

The project would be delayed a year if it had to depend on retrofitting hundreds of homes to recapture the 10-acre-feet of water the center will need. Towbes would rather pay \$100,000 toward state water.

cast for state water

No local drought alarm — yet

By Ann Fairbanks
Telegram-Tribune

Thanks to the slightly above-average rainfall last year, local water officials aren't too worried — yet — about the prospect of another year of drought.

"Our local supplies are fairly comfortable," said Gary Henderson, San Luis Obispo's water division manager.

Drastic measures won't be required this year, he and other officials said, even if the dry pattern continues.

So far this season, 1.73 inches of rain have fallen in San Luis Obispo, compared to the normal 3.63 inches.

January and February are the wettest months, so there's still hope. In fact, the National Weather Service reported a

60 percent chance of rain tonight and Thursday morning with scattered showers predicted Friday and Saturday.

"It's a little early to say the sky is falling," County Engineer Clint Milne said, "but it always is a good practice to conserve water — whether it's a wet or a dry year. I hope it becomes a habit."

It has become a habit in San Luis Obispo, where residents' water usage is still 35 percent less than it was in 1987, before conservation was mandated.

If the drought continues, Henderson said, the city would probably consider in April reinstating mandatory conservation measures. But they would call for only a 15 percent reduction, he said, "so resi-

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decades, much of California must depend almost entirely on the rain and snow that will fall this winter, the state's top water managers said.

"There's a possibility this could be the driest period on record," Maurice Roos, chief hydrologist for the state Department of Water Resources, said.

Roos and Resources Agency Secretary Douglas Wheeler laid out an arid prognos-

is at a Sacramento press conference Tuesday. The National Weather Service did nothing to dissipate the bad news, forecasting drier-than-normal weather through February.

This year's requests of the State Water Project total 3.85 million acre-feet — far more than the 2.3 million that the project

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Blockbuster Entertainment Corp.
spokesman Wally Knier said Tuesday
he didn't know why the company
won't stock "Shadows and Fog," but
said it wasn't because of Allen's
custody battle with Mia Farrow.
Allen has acknowledged having an
affair with the 21-year-old adopted
daughter of Farrow, his companion of