

Court draws the line in groundwater dispute

Shelly Escalante-Cone
Times Staff Writer

A Santa Clara County Superior Court has determined the maximum boundary for the groundwater basin at the center of a legal dispute between the city, several agencies and nearly 700 landowners.

“It’s good to see this case finally moving forward,” said Eric Garner, of Best, Best and Krieger, special counsel to the city. “We have a maximum boundary, so everyone outside of the boundary is out of the case,” he said.

City officials haven’t yet received a map outlining the

boundary but it is said to include “quite a bit of the Five Cities area,” said Dwayne Chisam of the city’s Utilities Department.

The judge’s determination gives landowners an opportunity to make a case for why they shouldn’t be included in the lawsuit and why they don’t affect water pumping from the Santa Maria Valley Groundwater Basin.

Along with determining the maximum boundary, the court issued a new Case Management Order, which will define the exact boundary of the basin. The court set an Oct. 9 trial date for this phase of the lawsuit.

At that trial, a judge will

decide whether areas like Pismo Beach, Arroyo Grande and Grover Beach should be included in the lawsuit.

The water basin dispute began in July 1997, when the Santa Maria Valley Water Conservation District filed suit against Santa Maria, Guadalupe, the Southern California Water Company, the Nipomo Community Services District and others in an effort to determine who has priority rights to pump water from the ground basin. After the dispute began, cross-complaints were filed and 700 valley landowners were added to the litigation.