

## **Water Plan Faces Two More Suits**

*LARRY PARSONS, STAFF*

### **Claimant says lower San Antonio, Nacimiento lake levels would hurt recreation**

Two claims totaling \$187 million filed by the resort operator at Lakes San Antonio and Nacimiento over the Salinas Valley Water Project could kill a proposed summer camp for at-risk youths, Monterey County's parks director said Wednesday. The claims filed by resort operator Dan Heath contend the water project's lowering of lake levels during summer would "devastate recreational interests" at the two reservoirs. One claim also alleges a camp program the county hoped to start at Lake San Antonio with the Coca-Cola Co. would directly compete with Heath's lake businesses.

"This could be the death knell for the project," county Parks Director John Pinio said. Pinio's department has been talking with Coca-Cola officials for the past 14 months about starting the "Camp Coca-Cola" program for 120 troubled children from Monterey and Santa Clara counties. It's likely the soft drink company will go elsewhere because it "doesn't want the program associated in any way with negativity," Pinio said.

Similar to a lawsuit already filed by Lake Nacimiento property owners against Monterey County, Heath contends the lower lake levels would severely damage his businesses. The project, in part, calls for increased summer releases from the two reservoirs to help replenish Salinas Valley aquifers and stop the spread of seawater into groundwater tables. "At times, there will probably be less water, and at other times there will probably be more," county Supervisor Lou Calcagno said.

Heath operates recreational businesses at the county-operated lakes under long-term leases with the county. He has spent millions to make improvements under the leases, his claims say. The damage claims, which are necessary to file formal lawsuits, were filed by Heath's companies, San Antonio Resorts and Water World Resorts. The claims allege the county is violating his leases by ruining the lakes.

"I think he is overreacting," Calcagno said. County officials say the dams and reservoirs were built by Monterey County taxpayers to serve two primary purposes: flood protection and Salinas Valley water supply. A county study estimated the lake level changes would damage recreational business at the lakes by \$3 million a year. "We don't deny it has impact on recreation, but the (supervisors) made sustainable findings that there were important health and safety considerations - to combat seawater intrusion," County Counsel Adrienne Grover said.

Heath outlined his complaints about the water project to county officials in July so the claims filed Monday were no surprise, Grover said. She noted Heath has been on a reservoir-operations committee for several years. "He must have had significant knowledge about the need for a water project," Grover said. In his claims, Heath contends the county made secret plans and concealed key reports while he was investing \$3.5 million in improvements under his leases.

### **What's next ?**

Monterey County supervisors will discuss the resort operator's claims against the Salinas Valley Water Project this month in closed session.