



Questions, answers flow from water project

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The following are answers to frequently asked questions about the Regional Water Project, which was unveiled by officials from several public agencies last week:

· What is the project?

The primary component of the project is a reverse osmosis desalination plant north of Marina, which will produce 10,000 acre-feet of potable water annually. It will be fed by seawater and brackish water and could be completed in 2014.

· Who will be responsible for the project management and operations?

Cal Am and each of the public agencies participating in the project will be responsible for their individual commitments.

The Marina Coast Water District will own and operate the plant.

California American Water will purchase the desalinated water and must build a 10-mile long delivery pipeline that connects to its existing distribution system.

The "feedwater" to the desalination plant will come from wells owned and operated by the county's

Water Resources Agency.

The Monterey Regional Water Pollution Control Agency will handle disposal of brine produced as a result of desalination.

· What is the objective of the project?

The desalination plant is proposed as the solution to overpumping on the Carmel River by Cal Am and is meant to establish a drought-resistant water source for the Monterey Peninsula.

In 1995, the state Water Resources Control Board ruled that Cal Am has a legal right to only 3,376 acre-feet from the river annually. A decree issued at the time directed the company to reduce its pumping from the river and pursue development of a new water source. Citing a lack of progress and noncompliance, the state board issued a cease-and-desist order in October calling for progressive pumping cutbacks through 2016.

The order is being contested and enforcement has been put on hold pending the outcome of litigation.

· Will the project provide water for future growth on the Peninsula?

No. The desalination plant does not address future water needs. It is designed only to make up for the ordered cutbacks on the Carmel River. The expectation is that current conservation efforts will continue and requirements for obtaining water credits or developing lots of record will not change.

However, the project allows the Marina Coast Water District to set aside 1,700 acre-feet of water to distribute when the need arises during Fort Ord redevelopment.

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· Can water production at the plant be expanded later?

Yes. It will be possible to increase plant production, but the process would require additional permits and approvals.

· How much will the project cost?

Estimates suggest construction of the desalination plant will cost between \$280 and \$390 million.

However, the Division of Ratepayer Advocates of the Public Utilities Commission says the final cost could be closer to \$450 million.

· Who will pay for the project?

Cal Am's ratepayers will pay for most of the cost through increased rates.

The Marina Coast Water District has agreed to contribute \$22million and in return will hold in reserve 1,700 acre-feet of water to be used for redevelopment projects on the former Fort Ord. The district's contribution to the project was determined based on what it would cost the district today to build its own desalination plant to provide water to future development on the old Army base.

Jim Heitzman, Marina Coast Water District's general manager, said grants and low-interest loans will be sought to try to keep costs down.

· Will Cal Am customers be subsidizing the cost of the project for the Marina Coast Water District?

Heitzman says each side will pay its fair share. The

delivery pipeline will only benefit the Monterey Peninsula, Heitzman said, and Marina Coast has no current need for increased water, but has agreed to take part in the project to make it possible,

Opponents contend Peninsula ratepayers are bearing the burden for most of the costs, but that Marina Coast Water District and the Salinas River Basin are reaping its benefits.

· How much will the desalinated water for the Peninsula cost?

The water will come with a price tag of about \$4,000 per acre-foot. One acre-foot of water is about 32,600 gallons.

· What will that do to rates for Cal Am customers?

Cal Am has said the cost of desalinated water will likely double the current rates after the plant is operational. For the average customer, bills would be about \$80 per month, according to Cal Am.

· What will the project do to water rates in Marina?

Rates will not be impacted until Marina Coast begins to use its share of desalinated water for redevelopment on the former Fort Ord, which could be several years into the future, Heitzman said.

· What is the benefit of the project to Marina Coast?

The water extracted from the ground and fed into the desalination plant will be a combination of seawater and fresh water from the Salinas River Basin — the ratio will be determined through well testing and monitoring. The fresh water is required by state law to remain in the Salinas Basin and Marina Coast, which is located over the Salinas

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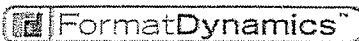


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Basin. Marina Coast will use that water to reduce its pumping elsewhere in the basin by the same amount, Heitzman said. The cost of pumping groundwater is about \$150 per acre-foot and water bills for customers in Marina Coast will not change.

· Will Marina Coast Water District make a profit off the desalinated water?

Heitzman says the project will result in no profits for Marina Coast. The money collected from Cal Am will pay for the project construction and its operating costs, he said.

· Will there be any project oversight?

An advisory committee with representatives from Cal Am, the county Water Resources Agency, Marina Coast and the Monterey Peninsula Water Management District will be formed. If there are conflicts, an independent third-party industry expert will make the decision, Heitzman said.

A second committee of community residents and elected officials will be formed to comment on project development, including cost and design.

Opponents say they do not believe the advisory role of these committees will sufficiently represent the interests of Peninsula water customers.

· What happens if the project fails?

Cal Am will assume all debts and liabilities related to the project.

· What will happen to the brine produced in the desalination process?

Brine will be disposed of through the existing ocean outfall of the Monterey Regional Water Pollution Control Agency. A permit from the Regional Water Quality Control Board is required and there could be conditions for treatment prior to release.

· What happens next?

The Marina Coast Water District board will consider approving its participation in the project Monday and the county Board of Supervisors will consider conditional approval of the project Tuesday.

The multiple partnership agreements must be submitted to an administrative law judge for review and hearings will be held in May. The judge is expected to issue a decision on whether to approve the project in June and the Public Utilities Commission could make a final decision later this year.

Permits from the California Coastal Commission and several other agencies would then need to be issued before construction could begin.

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2

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