



WATER DEBATE DELUGE

Pro: Project needs quick action

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With the state threatening to cut the Monterey Peninsula's water supply in half by 2016, it is time for the debate about how to solve our water needs to end.

The cost for our water supply will increase whether we find a new water sources or continue to pump water from the Carmel River system. While we are demonstrated leaders in conservation efforts, without a new water supply Cal Am, will be required to push conservation beyond health and safety limits, which will result in fines that will be borne by Peninsula customers, and continue a moratorium that will strangle our community and threaten our way of life.

This week, the Monterey County Water Resources Agency, the Marina Coast Water District and California American Water were able to release an agreement that lays out what that solution should look like, how it should be paid for and who will own, build and operate it. On Tuesday, the Board of Supervisors will consider approval of a public-private partnership and move forward with an essential element of the publicly sponsored regional water supply program called "Water for Monterey County."

The public ownership that comes from Marina Coast Water District and the Monterey County Water

Resources Agency's participation in the project benefits Peninsula customers because it makes the project eligible for grants and low-interest financing, and minimizes Cal Am's private financing of the project. The public side of this partnership will reduce projects costs that, while expensive, is 20 percent less than any alternative.

There are some who argue the process should be prolonged. As recommended by the 2009 grand jury, the status quo dysfunctional water management on the Peninsula must end. If we want to preserve our community, our jobs and quality of life, more studies and no action is no longer an option.

Critics of the regional water project say that water users on the Peninsula will be unfairly burdened with the cost of a desalination plant that will be built outside Cal Am's service territory, in Marina.

The truth is that those who receive benefit from the plant are the ones who will pay for it. Marina Coast Water District customers will contribute \$22 million for the construction of the project, which is their fair share, and when the former Fort Ord community needs the 1,700 acre feet of water allotted to Marina Coast Water District, they will pay their fair share of operating costs of the well.

It is important to recognize the project is a compromise proposal that needs Marina Coast customers to operate consistent with state law and responsible water resource management. The desal plant will treat brackish water from the Salinas groundwater basin. By law, any groundwater that comes from the Salinas Valley basin must stay in the basin. The fraction of brackish water that is "fresh groundwater" must stay in the Salinas Valley basin. So the amount of water delivered to Marina Coast Water District makes the project possible.

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Another criticism directed at the regional water project is that its leaders do not represent Peninsula residents. This, too, is far from the case. The major change the regional project will bring to Peninsula water users is a new source of water.

Today, Cal Am produces and treats water from the Carmel River. In the future, the company will be purchasing its water from the regional project. But the rates Cal Am charges will continue to be set the state Public Utilities Commission through an open, public process, the same as today. The process will ensure that no ratepayers are unfairly burdened.

There have been criticisms about apparent lack of transparency, or lack of public involvement, regarding the project. It must be recognized that the regional project was born from a public process that included monthly public meetings sponsored by the PUC's Division of Rate Payers Advocates for more than a year. These were well attended by a highly-engaged cross section of the public. The overwhelming majority of the group supported the brackish desal element of the regional project, as have local advocates for the Carmel River and virtually every Peninsula mayor.

Finally, critics have attacked the project from a technical point of view, arguing with modeling, faulting the desal technology, and suggesting that more studies and analyses are needed.

But no one has provided any scientifically based and economically viable alternative proposals. The regional water project is technically sound, is a proven means to supply water and is ready to be implemented. By issuing a Cease and Desist Order, the state has made it clear, we cannot afford to wait.

There is no question desal is expensive, but it is

the only feasible option for the Peninsula. The regional water project has achieved broader support than any alternative proposal during the past 30 years. The time to act is now.

Dave Potter is a Monterey County supervisor, Chuck Della Sala is mayor of Monterey, Ralph Rubio is mayor of Seaside, and Steve Collins is on the Monterey County Water Resources Agency board. If you go
·What: The Board of Supervisors will consider the agreement for the regional project.
·When: 1:30 p.m., April 6
·Where: Supervisors chambers, Monterey County Administrative Building, 168 W. Alisal St., Salinas

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