



## Ratepayer advocates propose cheaper water plan

- Treated sewage could become part of Peninsula's supply

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**A** GROUP that advises the California Public Utilities Commission has proposed a water supply for the Monterey Peninsula it says will cost \$100 million less than California American Water Company's desal plant.

"The thought was, are there any other local alternatives that could be implemented faster, cost less and have fewer environmental concerns?" said Keith Israel, director of the Monterey Regional Water Pollution Control Agency and a member of the Regional Project Technical Work Group appointed by the PUC Division of Ratepayer Advocates. "That is how this process started."

The new plan — called the "regional urban water supply evaluation" — was drawn up to identify the best and cheapest water solution for the Monterey Peninsula as an alternative to Cal Am's proposed Coastal Water Project, which will cost about \$230 million.

The new plan would provide from 12,500 to 28,400 acre-feet of water per year, according to its creators.

"We took every project that agencies in Monterey have looked at at some point in the past," said Steve Kasower, senior research economist with University of California Santa Cruz Center for Integrated Water Research, and a consultant to the DRA, "and we stuck some of them together."

Although the plan calls for a bulk of the Peninsula's water to come from a desalination plant, the plant would be smaller than the one proposed by Cal Am. Combining a small desal plant and several other projects would be less expensive to local ratepayers and be less controversial, Kasower said. Although not any one of the components on its own would be able to supply the Peninsula with all the water it needs, collectively they could, he said.

### **A combination of solutions**

To provide the Peninsula with 12,500 acre-feet of water per year, the plan calls for 8,330 AFY of desalination, 300 acre-feet of stormwater reuse, 150 acre-feet from conservation, 920 acre-feet of aquifer storage and recovery, 2,500 acre-feet of groundwater replenishment and 300 AFY of recycled water. A larger regional plan, which could be expanded in another phase, could provide as much as 28,400 acre-

feet of water.

One acre-foot of water is 325,851 gallons, which is enough to provide for three families for about one year.

The group has identified about 1,700 acre-feet of water it could “implement immediately,” including conservation, stormwater reuse, aquifer storage and recovery, and desalination from Sand City’s plant, which alone would provide 300 acre-feet per year.

“We are calling some of these projects the low-hanging fruit,” Kasower said. “These are projects that could get going easily.”

Although Kasower said a component such as stormwater reuse isn’t a “big-ticket item,” and on its own won’t provide the Peninsula with a large amount of water, he argued it’s one piece of the puzzle.

“Why not do it even if it’s two acre-feet?” he asked.

The stormwater would be captured in parking lots and directed to aquifers. Oils and pathogens would be removed as the water percolated through layered berms.

### **Big dollars saved**

Besides being a more environmentally friendly solution to solving the Peninsula’s water supply problems, Kasower said a multi-component project would cost much less than Cal Am’s Coastal Water Project.

“We are looking at a magnitude of perhaps \$100 million or so savings,” Kasower said. But it’s unknown exactly how much each component would cost. Kasower said the group is still seeking more studies to determine that. It’s also unknown how long it would take to implement the components.

But Kasower said the community probably can’t wait.

“We don’t know when the state water board will put the hammer down” and start imposing fines for overpumping from the Carmel River, Kasower said.

One of the more ambitious projects includes using treated sewage to recharge aquifers from which drinking-water is drawn. Although off-putting, the method is being used in Los Angeles and Orange counties, Israel said.

“The water would go through microfiltration, reverse osmosis, ultraviolet disinfection and hydrogen peroxide treatment and be brought up to beyond drinking water quality,” he said.

After being treated, the water would be injected into the Seaside aquifer, where it would remain for about a year before being distributed to Cal Am customers.

The project, which would provide at least 2,500 acre-feet per year, would be the first of its kind in Northern California, Israel said.

Admittedly, however, there is a public relations challenge in convincing customers that drinking treated wastewater is palatable and safe.

“It’s very hard to get people to understand that this technology is not rocket science, it’s not new,” Kasower said. “The community is going to have to become comfortable with this.”