



January 30, 2009

## Salinas Valley water, an abused resource

### *Second of two parts*

I recently purchased four gallons for one penny. What I bought surely was not gasoline, or ladies' perfume, it was the water coming from my kitchen tap. I received 5,236 gallons of drinking water over a period of 28 days for \$11.84. Doing my arithmetic that works out to be 23 cents per gallon. Is that a deal, or what? I recently wrote an article in this column about the potential water crisis that Salinas will likely face in the future. We, who live in Salinas, receive quality drinking water every time that we open our kitchen tap or open our shower or fill our bathtub. We pay only a fraction of a penny for each gallon. This price is quite standard for most areas of our country. This is the price for the actual water, and does not include additional meter fees and utility taxes.

We also have available to us, water sold in colorful bottles. This source of drinking water is referred to as "bottled water." The sources for this water is very similar as our tap water - maybe even the same. This bottled water, generally, comes from a groundwater well a spring, or perhaps, a connection to our city water supply. Each bottle looks attractive, catching our attention, and is labeled as drinking water, purified water, or spring water. We pay a significantly higher price for these containers of water (Evian bottled water sells for over \$21.00 per gallon). I, personally, use these bottled waters as a convenience drink; my primary source of water comes from my household tap.

We have used and abused our most necessary resource. This has caused water conservation efforts and increased water prices in some parts of our county. The price is still "dirt cheap", compared to other materials that we purchase, such as gasoline. At a recent "fill-up" of my vehicle, I paid \$1.89 per gallon. Doing my arithmetic, 5,236 gallons of gasoline would cost me over \$9,896 (The perfume price would be astronomical, nearly \$236 million for 5,236 gallons).

When we use and abuse our potable water, here in Salinas, to the point that we have destroyed the "cheap" water sources; what will we do? The voters approved the development of the Salinas Valley Water Project a number of years ago. One of the purposes of this project is to reduce the volume of fresh water being removed from our aquifers by agricultural pumping. Doing this would retard or slow down the progress of seawater intrusion into our aquifers. This project has been delayed by lawsuits, and regulatory permitting processes. All the while, seawater is intruding farther inland from our central California coast. California's central coast suffers from seawater intrusion more than any other coastal area in California. Once an aquifer is contaminated with salt, it is no longer usable as a potable water source. This aquifer is not likely to recover from this contamination; it's future use will be lost.

Well, we have seawater desalination, as a potential water source. Yes, we do. California American Water's Coastal Water Project proposes a desalination plant near Moss Landing's Duke Energy Plant, to provide additional water service to coastal Monterey County. This proposed plant would process 42 million gallons per day of cooling water to produce 18 million gallons per day of potable water. Desalination is not an efficient process.. This quantity of water would supply about 96,000 homes with my water consumption. What about agricultural water needs? Does Salinas have access to this water source, or are there city plans to assure adequate water supply to the citizens of Salinas? Are we just going to continue abusing our water sources, until these sources are dry or intruded by the sea? Our withdrawal of water from the Salinas Valley's hydrologic unit has put some areas in a "borrow from Peter to pay Paul" status - how long can we continue in this mode, before we ruin the entire water resource?

I don't have the answers to these questions, and I ask whether we, as residents of this city and

county, need to be concerned about this impending crisis. I also ask what will be the cost of our inaction, to our future generations? Water has always been cheap, but I am sure that it will become more expensive for future generations. Let's all, residents as well as, agriculture become more aware of how we use our water source; and not abuse it!

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