

Report: Water plans need work

Hefty environmental impact review cites problems with all three proposals

By DANIEL LOPEZ
Herald Staff Writer

Posted: 01/31/2009 01:34:46 AM PST

A three-volume environmental impact review of potential sources of water for the Peninsula released Friday reveals snags in all of the plans.

The state Public Utilities Commission report says there are several unresolved issues with each of the three projects it evaluated: California American Water's Moss Landing desalination plant; the North Marina Project, a desalination plant using slant wells; and the Regional Water Supply Project proposed by the Water for Monterey County Coalition.

Water officials and the public have a little more than a month to analyze the massive report before the first of four public meetings, beginning March 2, is held to discuss the issues.

The public comment period ends April 1, and a final report will be prepared afterward.

Although water officials, including those at Cal Am, haven't had time to go through the report, some obstacles to the desalination projects were pointed out.

· The proposed Cal Am plant hinges on getting its seawater from the Moss Landing Power Plant, which uses intake pipes in the harbor to bring water into the plant for cooling. A possibility exists that the power plant's permit to use the pipes may not be renewed.

A Monterey County ordinance prohibits private companies from owning water desalination plants in the county.

· The possibility that water from the Salinas Valley could be used to supply the Peninsula through the North Marina Project or the Regional Project could become a controversial issue, according to the report.

· Working agreements in the Regional Project between the involved agencies need to be formalized.

Supplied by river

Since 1995, Cal Am has operated under a state order to reduce its pumping from the Carmel River because it was taking more water than it had a legal right to, threatening fish and wildlife. About 75 percent of the Peninsula's water comes from the river. The water company is also under orders to reduce its take from the Seaside groundwater basin.

Recently, Cal Am has faced increased pressure from the state Water Resources Control Board to comply with the 1995 order.

The decree said the company has a legal right to only 3,376 acre-feet of water annually from the Carmel River, but the agency allowed Cal Am to take up to 11,285 acre-feet annually while it "diligently" pursued a new water source.

Cal Am says it has complied with that order, and has explored several alternative water sources that, through no fault of its own, did not pan out.

The state water board held hearings on the compliance issue last summer, and its upcoming ruling is expected to have a big impact on the company's allowable pumping from the river.

Advertisement

A bright idea in online advertising.

PrinterStitial® ads by Format Dynamics.

FormatDynamics®

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

Test plant

For several years, Cal Am has proposed building a desal plant as a source of water for its customers on the Peninsula, and in 2008 it began testing a small pilot plant.

Construction of the Moss Landing plant and a 26-mile pipeline needed to deliver the water for distribution would cost about \$250 million. The production yield would be about 10 million gallons of desalinated water per day — nearly the same amount of water as the 3,376 acre-feet the company would be getting from the Carmel River — with an annual operating cost of \$10 million.

Cal Am says the plant could be completed by 2015, but the project would require PUC approval and a permit from the state Coastal Commission.

Meetings to discuss the three plans will be held at 1:30 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. March 2 at Embassy Suites Hotel Monterey Bay, 1441 Canyon Del Rey Blvd., Seaside; at 6:30 p.m. March 3 at North County Recreation Center, 11261 Crane St., Castroville; and at 6:30 p.m. March 4 at Rancho Cañada Golf Course, 4860 Carmel Valley Road, Carmel.

See the report at Monterey County's libraries or at www.cwp-eir.com/docs.html.

Daniel Lopez can be reached at 646-4494 or dlopez@montereyherald.com.

Advertisement



FormatDynamics®

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™