

# **Dave Stoldt, Guest Commentary: Water Supply – The Testimony That Never Was**

By **DAVE STOLDT** |

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Last week on these pages, you heard the President of California American Water explain their rationale for withdrawing their application for a desalination plant from the California Coastal Commission the day before their Sept. 17 hearing. What he didn't tell you is that there is a feasible alternative project that has less environmental impact, is more socially just, and would be less costly to ratepayers – Pure Water Monterey expansion – and that the Coastal Commission was highly likely to deny their desalination permit.

Here is a summary of the Monterey Peninsula Water Management District's testimony that was never heard at the canceled Sept. 17 meeting.

First, the District and Cal Am share common objectives: to replace unlawful Carmel River diversions, allow reduced Seaside Basin pumping, pay back the Seaside Basin deficit, provide water for future housing and jobs, meet peak needs and fire flows, minimize environmental impacts, and make water affordable.

The water supply planning process is all about three straightforward questions: How much do we use today? How much do we need? How soon do we need it? To the first of these, the District and Cal Am's current filings in front of the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) agree that present usage is about 9,800 acre-feet per year. The proposed desalination plant is based on the faulty assumption that current usage is 12,350 acre-feet a year, which it is not. To the second question, Cal Am stated to the CPUC that the Peninsula "needs" 15,300 acre-feet a year. The CPUC – despite performing no original analysis of its own – stated it thinks the number is closer to 14,000 acre-feet. The District in a careful re-analysis of the original assumptions pegs that number at 10,900 to 12,300 acre-feet a year. The biggest departure of opinion relates to the third question of how soon we need it. Historical data, as well as third-party job and housing forecasts, show the Peninsula does not, and cannot, grow fast enough to use all the water from the new supply options within 30 years.

In other words, Pure Water Monterey expansion can meet all the Peninsula water needs for several decades, even though it is 36% the size of the desalination plant and \$1 billion less expensive over 30 years.

Three technical and legal memos have clearly demonstrated there is more than enough source water for the expansion, that it can be done without Salinas Valley irrigation or surface waters, does not need to rely on agricultural wash water, is drought-resistant, and Monterey One Water has legal contractual rights to the water an expansion requires.

As to some of the other already existing sources of supply on the Peninsula, another respected third-party firm has shown Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR) to be drought-resistant. Data shows its average injection of stored water over the past four years has been right on its assumed annual availability of 1,300 acre-feet a year. Certainly, we would like to see more good weather years to increase the drought reserve in the ground from ASR, Pure Water Monterey, and the expansion.

Finally, last week Cal Am said it will do everything it can do to manage limited supplies and avoid rationing. Yet, the numbers actually show that with full delivery of the Pure Water Monterey base phase-1 project next fiscal year, EXISTING supplies will be sufficient to satisfy the state's cease and desist order, avoid penalties, avoid rationing, and allow the community and its water leaders to take a deep breath, put ratepayers ahead of the company, and rethink what it will take to deliver sufficient, safe, reliable, and affordable water to us all on the Monterey Peninsula.

Pure Water Monterey expansion is what it will take.

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