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From River Salvation to Climate Buster

For decades, California American Water Company and its predecessor have been illegally diverting water from the Carmel River. This almost wiped out the threatened steelhead in that important coastal river. Those diversions provide 2/3rds of the water supply for the entire Monterey Peninsula. Because there was no alternative water source, the illegal diversions were allowed to continue.

But in 2008, a combination of alternative water sources was identified: most would be ocean water desalination and lesser amounts from groundwater recharge and water recycling. The ocean desalination would use subsurface intakes (below the sand off the shore). That would avoid one of the largest objections to ocean desalination, namely the entrapment and entrainment of sea life that occurs with a desal project that would use open water intakes.

Once alternative water sources were identified, PCL initiated a proceeding at the State Water Resources Control Board. That resulted in a Cease and Desist Order requiring CALAM to develop alternative supplies. The groundwater recharge project and a larger than expected recycled water project went

forward as did increased water conservation. The result has been that the illegal diversions were reduced by 80%, to less than 3,000 acre-feet annually.

That left a relatively small increment to be made up by the ocean desalination project. But that's where the desal project went from river saver to climate buster. Analyses by the Monterey Peninsula Water Management District showed that a feasible expansion of the water recycling project could more than make up for the remaining shortfall.

Ocean water has more than ten times the concentration of salt to be removed as compared to recycled water. Simple physics means that ocean water desalination is much more energy-intensive than water recycling. Generation of that energy creates greenhouse gas. Energy generation for the proposed ocean desalination plant would result in more than twice the carbon emissions than the recycled water plant expansion. The impact is actually even greater than that because an expanded water recycling plant would use available methane from the adjacent landfill.

One might think that the ocean desalination project is still being pursued because it is less expensive. But that too is not the case. Expanding the existing water recycling plant would cost less than \$200 million. The lifetime cost of the ocean desalination project would be almost \$1 billion. Yes, that is "billion" with a B - to meet a need of less than 3,000 acre-feet a year.

CALAM's water rates are already the most expensive in the entire country. Skyrocketing their bills with that load would be hard for any customers and would be disastrous for the disadvantaged residents within CALAM's service area. Lastly, there is the issue of the coast itself. For decades, there has been an intrusive sand mining operation right on the beach in the City of Marina. It took the Coastal Commission and others that long to finally get it to be removed. Now, after that long-fought victory, CALAM is coming in and saying that they could need as much as seven acres of this very coastal location for their intake well field and related facilities and they claim easements over 30 acres of the site.

We have all heard some projects described as win-win-win. This proposed ocean desalination project is lose-lose-lose. The climate would lose. The coast would lose. And the ratepayers would lose.

Expanding the existing water recycling project truly would be a real win-win-win.

There would be only a fraction of the greenhouse gases. There would be no intrusion on the coast. And ratepayers would save hundreds of millions of dollars.

The Coastal Commission is scheduled to consider CALAM's application at their November 14th meeting in Chula Vista. If you care about the climate, the coast, or water rates, let them know this project should not be approved.

To contact Coastal Commission members, please email to CalAmMonterey@coastal.ca.gov.

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