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Massive recycled water project for Monterey Peninsula, Salinas Valley leaps forward

By [Jim Johnson](#), *Monterey Herald*

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Monterey >> A sweeping proposal to convert wastewater to drinking water for the Monterey Peninsula and irrigation water for the northern Salinas Valley reached a critical milestone Wednesday with the release of a draft environmental impact report.

[A 1,244-page report for the groundwater replenishment project](#), dubbed Pure Water Monterey, was released by the Monterey Regional Water Pollution Control Agency and the Monterey Peninsula Water Management District, who are backing the project and paying the \$1.5 million cost for the review.

Water district general manager Dave Stoldt lauded the \$113 million project as “revolutionary.”

“The future of water is here,” Stoldt said in a statement. “This project is truly revolutionary in that it addresses multiple water-related issues including supply, treatment, and environmental mitigation in two distinct regions while delivering water for residential, business, industrial and agricultural uses.”

The project would tap Peninsula wastewater and stormwater, along with Salinas-area produce wash water and contaminated runoff, for a new water treatment plant and the expansion of an existing irrigation-quality recycled water treatment plant capacity. About 3,500 acre-feet of potable water would be injected into the Seaside basin for storage and later use. It is seen by supporters as an environmentally friendlier alternative to desalination.

If built, the project would allow California American Water to build a smaller desal plant to replace its Carmel River water supply, which is subject to a state-ordered cutback that is scheduled to take full effect by the start of 2017. Peninsula officials say the project could provide water by the end of 2017 — two years ahead of Cal Am’s desal project schedule — and argue it could help reduce the area’s reliance on river water without a full cutback.

Regional water pollution control agency general manager Keith Israel said the project was a “natural progression forward” for his organization, which he noted has been treating and providing recycled water for years. Israel called the project a “critical component of solving our region’s water supply issues.”

“Not only is it an environmentally responsible project, but it is projected to be online and delivering water by the fall of 2017,” he said in a statement.

The release triggers a 45-day public review period that ends June 5. A pair of public meetings are likely to be held in Seaside and Salinas next month.

Up to 5,900 acre-feet of irrigation water per year would go to the Castroville Seawater Intrusion Project, along with up to 1,000 acre-feet of “drought reserve” water accumulated during rainy years.

The draft environmental report identifies key impacts that would need to be mitigated, including those to marine water quality and wildlife as a result of brine discharge from the agency’s existing outfall pipeline, which would be used by both the new treatment plant and Cal Am’s desal plant. The report also noted possible impacts to fish habitats, coastal erosion and more, but found the only significant unavoidable impact to be from construction noise.

Negotiations over water sources for the project are ongoing, and the five agencies involved — the water management district, pollution control agency, city of Salinas, county Water Resources Agency and Marina Coast Water District — are meeting Thursday. Stoldt said talks have progressed far enough that the project may no longer need an agreement with Salinas Valley agricultural interests.

The June 30 deadline for that deal has already been extended three months, but Israel said the real deadline is the November hearings before the California Public Utilities Commission.

Public meetings on the draft EIR will be held at 6 p.m. May 20 at the Oldemeyer Center in Seaside, and at 4 p.m. May 21 at Hartnell College in Salinas.

The document can be viewed online at www.purewatermonterey.org, as well as in hard copy at the pollution control agency's administrative office, 5 Harris Court, Bldg. G, Monterey, or at area public libraries.

Comments should be directed by mail to: Monterey Regional Water Pollution Control Agency, Administrative Office, attn: Bob Holden, Principal Engineer, 5 Harris Court, Bldg. G, Monterey, CA, 93940; or submitted by email to gwr@mrwpca.com, or by fax to 831-372-6178.

Jim Johnson can be reached at 726-4348.