

## **PUC backs Pure Water Monterey recycled water project, Cal Am pipeline**

### **Praises \$85M project and \$50M pipeline as key steps in securing new water supply**

*By Jim Johnson, Monterey Herald*

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San Francisco >>> Praising the Pure Water Monterey recycled water project as “very innovative” and a “very important step” toward bringing a replacement water supply to the Monterey Peninsula, the state Public Utilities Commission on Thursday unanimously approved a critical water purchase agreement for the \$85 million proposal, along with a \$50 million California American Water-owned delivery pipeline and pump station.

Commissioner Catherine Sandoval, who is assigned to the Peninsula water supply project proceeding, urged her fellow commissioners to approve the proposal, noting its importance as part of a long-sought new water source for the Peninsula and as the first milestone in an extended Carmel River pumping cutback order, as well as advancing state policy on water reuse.

Commissioner Liane Randolph noted the Peninsula’s reputation as one of the top water conservation areas in the state and said the area would now be known for unique ways to produce water as a result of the proposal. Commissioner Mike Florio recalled the long history of the Peninsula’s pursuit of a new water supply to replace its over-reliance on the river. Florio also pointed out there was more to be resolved regarding the Peninsula water supply issue and anticipated “further action” later this year — presumably referring to the expected December release of a revised draft of a combined state and federal environmental review document.

While the recycled water project still needs to secure key permits, Thursday’s commission approval of the water purchase agreement allowing Cal Am to buy 3,500 acre-feet of product water from the Monterey Peninsula Water Management District via recycled water advanced treatment plant owner and operator Monterey Regional Water Pollution Control Agency was a major step.

Pollution Control Agency general manager Paul Sciuto praised the commission’s approval as a “critical milestone” for the project and the ability to finance it.

“This allows us to have certainty in a customer so we can qualify for the (low-interest) state revolving fund loans to pay for the project,” Sciuto said. “We have a lot of work to do.”

The recycled water project seeks to treat Peninsula and Salinas Valley wastewater sources to potable water standards before injecting it into the Seaside basin, where it would mix with other water supplies and be pumped out for later use by Cal Am’s Monterey district customers. The new supply would allow Cal Am to cut its river pumping by a corresponding amount in compliance with the river cutback order. Cal Am has promised to pursue a smaller, 6.4-million-gallon-per-day desalination plant, which would still provide about two-thirds of the proposed new Peninsula water supply, as a result of the recycled water project under a “portfolio” approach considered to be environmentally superior.

Construction on the recycled water project, including the new treatment plant, is set to start by February with completion and water delivery slated for early 2018, well before the desal plant is expected to be operational.

In addition, the project envisions providing up to 5,600 acre-feet of secondary treated water for irrigation through the Castroville Seawater Intrusion Project, helping farmers deal with heavily contaminated agricultural

runoff by transforming it into a usable commodity designed to offset seawater intrusion into the groundwater basin.

Meanwhile, the Cal Am delivery pipeline will run along a seven-mile route from Seaside to Pacific Grove, allowing the company to pump Seaside basin water including recycled water, aquifer storage recovery water and other sources past a “hydraulic trough” near the Naval Postgraduate School in the current water system. Originally intended primarily for the desal plant, the pipeline was allowed to proceed in advance to “maximize” the use of recycled water and other supplemental sources.

Groundbreaking on the pipeline project is expected next month, with completion a year later.

“It’s an important day in water issues on the Monterey Peninsula,” Cal Am’s Catherine Stedman said, “not only because we will be breaking ground on the first piece of major infrastructure for our future water supply, but because with this decision the CPUC has helped our community meet the first milestone in the (river cutback) order months ahead of schedule.”

Four local residents spoke during public comment at Thursday’s meeting, including Peninsula businessman Paul Bruno, former Carmel councilman Ken Talmage, Monterey County Business Council president Brian Turlington, and labor union leader Glen Schaller, all urging the commission to approve the proposal.

*Jim Johnson can be reached at 831-726-4348.*

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