



Frequently Asked Questions Cal Am Water's Monterey Peninsula Water Supply Project

What is a seawater desalination plant?

A desalination plant is a facility which converts salty seawater into clean drinking water. In the proposed project, reverse osmosis technology would be used, sending saline water through a semi-permeable membrane filter, leaving potable water on one side and highly concentrated saline solution, known as brine, on the other. The leftover brine is then diluted with seawater and pumped back into the ocean. Due to high energy demand along with high initial and operational costs, desalination plants are the most expensive form of drinking water production and bring significant environmental impacts. **However, in reality, hydrogeologists and recent Stanford research studies prove that the Monterey Peninsula Water Supply Project's (MPWSP) desal plant will extract huge amounts of groundwater rather than just seawater.**

How is the water collected?

The project proposes using slant wells, pulling both groundwater and seawater resources. Because of the questionable feasibility of slant wells, there is currently not a single commercial desalination plant using this technology anywhere in the world. Moreover, the location of the proposed slant wells specifically targets groundwater from aquifers beneath Marina's jurisdiction, jeopardizing the natural groundwater processes and the City's only supply of fresh drinking water.

What is the demand for this project?

The project need is vastly overstated. The desalination plant would result in a new water supply for Cal Am of more than 10,750 acre-feet per year (afy), giving Cal Am a total water supply of about 16,000 afy. However, existing demand is only around 9,500 afy and conservation measures should be prioritized to balance growing population needs. The true need for additional water supplies will likely be reviewed by an Administrative Law Judge at the California Public Utilities Commission.

Where does the City of Marina get its water?

The City of Marina currently obtains 100 percent of its potable water from groundwater underneath the City. The Salinas Valley Groundwater Basin includes several subbasins, which are seriously threatened by the proposed Cal Am project. The project's slant wells would draw water from the 180/400 aquifer that has been classified as one of 21 "critically overdrafted" groundwater basins out of more than 400 basins in the state. Drawing freshwater from this location not only will deplete limited resources, but it will also allow seawater intrusion and contamination to occur in the Monterey subbasin that is used for drinking water. The proposed MPWSP is in direct conflict with California's new Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) which aims to protect and restore our precious groundwater supplies, and would further jeopardize this already endangered resource.

Who is building this project?

The project would be built by California American (Cal Am), a subsidiary of the private, for-profit, water utility provider, American Water Works Company, Inc., headquartered in New Jersey. Cal Am serves customers in approximately 85% of the Monterey Peninsula and approximately 615,000 customers statewide. By virtue of the for-profit nature of Cal Am, all investment costs are passed on to customers through rate increases. But Cal Am does not serve the residents or businesses in the City of Marina, which depend on the Marina Coast Water District instead.

Will this project increase water rates?

To build this expensive project, Cal Am will likely increase its customers' water rates further, on top of the increases that already took effect earlier this year. Additionally, Marina residents would be uniquely impacted. The project will likely degrade water quality and deplete resources in the City's groundwater aquifer, thereby raising water production or treatment costs for Marina Coast Water District, or requiring the purchase of extremely expensive replacement water.

Who will the project serve?

The project will serve Monterey peninsula residents that are customers of the for-profit Cal Am. The City of Marina, however, is served by the publicly owned Marina Coast Water District. The project will have a disproportionate impact on the city's disadvantaged communities, who will be faced with negative impacts to their water supply, construction and operational impacts without receiving any of the project benefits. Simply put, Marina will be harmed for the benefit of neighboring cities who don't want this project in their own backyard.

Will this construction cause harmful community impacts?

The impacts to the Marina community may be significant in both the short and long term. The project represents a large industrial use with the potential to result in severe irreversible impacts to the City, particularly in regards to potential depletion and contamination of its water supply, and the likely huge adverse impacts to its sensitive coastal ecosystem.

Will this impact the coastal ecosystem?

The project is likely to have significant impacts on Marina's coastal ecosystem. With regard to marine biological resources, the project area is home to 34 species of mammals, over 180 species of seabirds, 525 fish species, four sea turtle species, 31 different invertebrate phyla, and over 450 species of marine algae. In addition, the project area is home to 27 federally designated threatened and endangered species. In the distillation process, the project will produce 14 million gallons of high-salinity brine discharge per day, which will then be deposited in the seafloor of the marine sanctuary. The project's slant wells would be sited in Marina's sensitive coastal habitat and would likely accelerate coastal erosion on Marina's beaches as well as adversely impact the coastal dunes.

