



INFORMATION REPORT

DATE: April 3, 2013

TO: City Manager
DEPARTMENT: Water
SUBJECT: Regional Seawater Desalination Project Permitting/Regulatory Agency Meeting

APPROVED: DATE:

Over the past several years, City staff has worked closely with other water agencies through its membership in CalDesal to partner with many state and federal regulatory agencies and Non-Governmental Organizations regarding the permitting of desalination facilities in the State of California. CalDesal is an association consisting of both public water agencies and consulting firms with various areas of expertise that support the evaluation and development of environmentally responsible desalination and salinity management in California. This is a fairly new process as desalination is relatively new to the State as we have traditionally opted instead for the pursuit of less expensive surface and ground water supplies. Now that those traditional supplies are proving to be overused and increasingly unavailable, agencies are seeking alternative supplies such as desalination and reclaim.

The objective of both the water agencies and the regulators is to create a permitting process that allows the addition of desalination to the state's water portfolios while assuring adequate protection of the environment. Because there are at least 12 regulatory agencies actively engaged in this permitting there has been a lot of overlap and redundancy and has failed to take advantage of a lot of information that is being compiled by many agencies studying desalination.

CalDesal and its member agencies have worked closely with these agencies, regularly attending meetings throughout the state and offering the many reports and studies that have been completed in order to better inform regulators on the many aspects of desalination projects, e.g. intake studies, brine disposal studies, pilot plants, etc.

In 2012, the CalDesal Executive Committee negotiated a partnership with the California Natural Resources Agency for a standing workgroup of water agencies and State/Federal regulatory agencies. The partnership provides that the Natural Resources Agency staff will convene a meeting of all the appropriate regulatory agencies at the request of any water agency at which desalination projects can be discussed and any concerns expressed between the regulators and the water agency. The regulatory agencies welcomed such a collaboration because it would help assure that agency questions and concerns could be known and addressed early-on so that proposed projects could be studied and designed with attention to matters of concern.

Water Department staff is pleased to announce that Santa Cruz was the first water agency in the State to take advantage of this standing workgroup opportunity and on February 1, 2013, joined Soquel Creek Water District staff in Sacramento for the first-ever “ Seawater Desalination Project Permitting/Regulatory Agency Meeting.”

Regulators at the table included:

- CA Natural Resources Agency
- CA State Lands Commission
- CA State Water Resources Control Board
- Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board
- CA Coastal Commission
- California Department of Fish and Wildlife
- NOAA / Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary
- NOAA/NMFS, Southwest Region
- US Army Corps of Engineers
- US Fish & Wildlife Service

The City of Santa Cruz and Soquel Creek Water District (scwd² team) provided a presentation on the project background and need, and discussed a basic overview of the project components under consideration, including intake location, plant site locations, and conveyance facilities alternatives. They also identified other issues being reviewed as part of the environmental review process, including energy use and greenhouse gas emissions and brine disposal.

In return, the regulators then posed many questions and shared their various issues about the processes related to desalination. Many of the questions related to studies that had been done and what those studies had revealed. Answers to those questions stimulated discussion about how such studies might be expanded or altered to assure any other matters are studied and resolved.

In closing the California Natural Resources Agency indicated it would continue to invite the federal agencies to these State Agency Workgroup quarterly meetings, as needed, seeing the need as projects will also need to apply for federal permits. There was general agreement that the federal permitting issues tend to be project- and site-specific, so it seems that federal agencies would most likely be involved on a project-by-project basis. All attendees agreed that it is important for the agencies to be communicating with each other and project owners early and often, and indicated that there was a regular meeting established to discuss the Monterey Bay desalination projects, and suggested that the scwd² project should be brought into that discussion. The group also generally agreed that a follow-up meeting would be beneficial after the agencies had a chance to review the Draft EIR, and were starting to formulate comments.

The scwd² team offered to provide links to background technical studies including pilot projects to resource agencies requesting such. The Natural Resources Agency offered to be the clearinghouse for technical data.

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Staff is reporting this to you as an example of the City's efforts to be a positive participant in developing seawater desalination permitting conditions in the State of California that are protective of the environment while allowing the consideration of adding this technology to the water portfolio.

Submitted by:

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Water Director

Attachments: None

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