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Desalination reconsidered as way to quench water needs

Local water agency says valley would indirectly benefit from proposals

KEITH MATHENY • THE DESERT SUN • FEBRUARY 18, 2010

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Sun rises over the Salton Sea hitting the mountains on the sea's northwest side. (The Desert Sun file photo)

Is the ocean a solution to Western water needs?



| Project Name | Location | Capacity | Cost | Notes |
|------------------|----------------------|----------|---------------|--|
| Huntington Beach | Huntington Beach, CA | 100 mgd | \$1.2 billion | Proposed by Huntington Beach Water Treatment Plant |
| Camp Pendleton | Camp Pendleton, CA | 100 mgd | \$1.2 billion | Proposed by Camp Pendleton Water Treatment Plant |
| Carlsbad | Carlsbad, CA | 100 mgd | \$1.2 billion | Proposed by Carlsbad Water Treatment Plant |

"The plant will unnecessarily impact our environment — our carbon footprint and our marine and coastal ecosystem."

Gabriel Solmer
legal director for the Coastkeeper group

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Once a pipe dream, using the Pacific Ocean to help solve the parched west's water needs is becoming a more real possibility by the day.

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A number of major desalination projects are under consideration or actively in the works in California and northern Mexico, which would take seawater and reduce its salt content to make it a potable water source.

While none of the projects call for directly providing water to assist the Coachella Valley with meeting its future needs, helping cities such as San Diego, Las Vegas and Phoenix has a ripple effect, Coachella Valley Water District General Manager Steve Robbins said.

"The less pressure there is to take water out of the desert and move it to the coast, the better off it is in the long run for the Coachella and Imperial valleys, and the Salton Sea," he said.

A confluence of circumstances is making desalination more of a reality: a desire for more stable and abundant water supplies — and a more logical financial equation.

"The costs for alternative water supplies other than through desal have raised, and desal has come down. Now they're coming closer together," said Jerry Zimmerman, executive director of the Colorado River Board of California.

The California Coastal Commission earlier this month rejected a challenge to a proposed \$550 million desalination facility in Carlsbad. The facility, which would create enough water to meet 300,000 residents' needs each year, is proposed by a private firm, Poseidon Resources, which also proposes a desalination facility in Huntington

Beach.

Poseidon is covering the costs of the facility and would then sell the created water to local cities and water agencies.

Desalination is part of a larger effort to diversify the water portfolio at the San Diego County Water Authority, water resources manager Robert Yamada said.

Motivation to diversify came after the agency's difficulties getting through drought periods in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

"We came out of that with a clear direction — we never want that to happen again," Yamada said.

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DesertFiddler wrote:
Replying to Panorama:

Judging from these past rains, climate change may provide the Coachella Valley with enough rainfall to keep our aquifers full, and we won't need desalination. Imagine, Palm Springs a tropical oasis.

Imagine a string of resevoirs to boat and fish in. To draw from in times of emergency. A hedge off-setting the Colorado River Authority's multi-state plan that sells our water to San Diego.

The Valley planners have missed the boat on this one. What a shame.

2/19/2010 10:29:12 AM

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m2march wrote:
Perpetuating this or conservation won't help the enviro's rape us with tiered water rates or allow them to dry up agricultural areas and continue to push people out of California, that is the real agenda - depopulation.

2/18/2010 5:58:32 PM

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Panorama wrote:
Judging from these past rains, climate change may provide the Coachella Valley with enough rainfall to keep our aquifers full, and we won't need desalination. Imagine, Palm Springs a tropical oasis.

2/18/2010 5:01:23 PM

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waterecycler wrote:
The water flowing into the Salton Sea can be desalted to far better quality for irrigation than the Water from Colorado river and for only a fraction of the cost of desalting seawater. Coastal ceries in southern California will save huge amounts by buying the salty waterflowing into the Salton Sea, desalting it, and tradingthat water for Colorado River wate now use dforirrigation. A reasonable estimate is a savings of half. see www.waterecyclinc.com jgrott@cox.net

2/18/2010 4:41:50 PM

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DesertFiddler wrote:
I've seen and fished tributaries to the Salton Sea. A backwater, with aquatic wildlife, cleans and filters the liquid manure pouring in from the Alamo and New Rivers. I've caught freshwater largemouth bass 100 yards from the Salton's shore. If we'd only use some common sense and start resevoiring off the 3 main tributaries, including the Whitewater river, we'd create much cleaner water that would be entering the Sea. Lower phosphates, metals, and biological waste would be entering, so less algae blooms and salinity would be one of the immediate results.

It's so much cheaper resevoiring off the water we have, then spend outrageous amounts on trying to pipe it in. But Agricultural big \$\$ interests stand in the way of resevoiring off the large segments of the Alamo and New. They need to be sued under the Clean Water Act, forced to give up acreage to serve as a resevoir. Additional reperations would go to suing the next polluting offender down the line.

A temporary solution.

2/18/2010 12:05:30 PM

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