

**MONTEREY WATER ISSUES:
Editorial: Water solution depends on unity
Monterey Herald – 1/20/08**

In a region grown accustomed to the status quo, last week's proposed state order calling for dramatically reduced pumping from the Carmel River may have seemed to some as just another turn of the water wheel.

For reasons of politics and geography, the shortage of usable water on the Peninsula has long been considered as unbending as death and taxes. It has become, to many, something to live with, not something to solve.

Similarly, the populace has come to accept the reality that the Carmel River cannot survive if it continues to supply some 112,000 people living in what would be an almost perfect place, if only it had a sustainable water supply.

Oddly, considering how deeply many here feel about quality of life and environmental issues, the not-so-slow death of the river and the habitat it supports has stirred little passion except among those devoted to endangered fish.

So it becomes rather easy to imagine the Peninsula public forming an unlikely coalition with water purveyor California American Water and fighting rather than supporting the state Water Resources Control Board's long-awaited pronouncement that when it comes to draining the river, enough is finally enough.

For those who care about the future of the river and of the Peninsula itself, that would not be the wisest course. It seems likely that we could get the timetable pushed back a bit, but delay wouldn't really diminish the awesome scope of what is coming.

The proposed order from the state Water Resources Control Board would create an actual timetable for Cal Am to start complying with the long-ignored, 1995 state order limiting the water that can be pumped from the river. In stages, it would reduce the flow by 15 percent, then more until, by the year 2014, the pumping would be cut in half.

By Cal Am's estimates, enhanced conservation efforts by an already conservation-minded public would make the first few years tolerable but, by the end, the Peninsula could comply only through extreme measures.

The only obvious alternative to letting the landscape dry up, to draining the pools, to canceling construction projects, is to create another water supply. Cal Am has a decent start on that idea with its plans for a desalination plant in Moss Landing, but the bureaucratic hurdles and the almost-guaranteed challenges by environmental groups make it unlikely that it could be on line by 2020 much less 2014.

It is time for those who would block that project to reflect on which is truly worse, the environmental issues raised by desalination or the human and environmental issues raised by a dried out Peninsula and a dried up river.

It also is time for the Peninsula to dust off its conservation pamphlets. Past droughts made the Peninsula a model of conservation, but old habits have a way of returning when crisis is over.

The heart of Cal Am's conservation strategy is to impose higher and higher rates tiered to prices dramatically higher than today's. On top of rate hikes the utility already has in the works, Peninsula water soon could be as expensive as tap water anywhere.

Ultimately, the region is facing a water crisis that could radically change life on the Peninsula. It is not just Cal Am's problem. An unlimited number of Peninsula water management district meetings won't solve it. It is a community problem that can be fixed only if those involved in the water debates of the past decade agree to seek solution rather than controversy, commonality rather than division.

It can be done. #

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**WATER REDUCTION ORDER:
Cal Am fights cutback order; State wants river pumping cut sharply**

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By Kevin Howe, staff writer

California American Water will challenge a draft cease-and-desist order issued by the state Water Resources Control Board that would require a drastic reduction in water pumping from the Carmel River aquifer over the next seven years.

On Monday, attorneys for the water company sent a letter to James W. Kassel, the board's assistant deputy director for water rights, saying the health of the company's approximately 38,000 metered water customers could be jeopardized if they can't get adequate water supplies.

The draft order, issued Jan. 15, would compel Cal Am to reduce its take from the Carmel River in stages over the next seven years from 15 to 50 percent. Even that level of reduction would allow Cal Am to divert more river water than the state says it has legal rights to.

The order could put Peninsula residents on a strict water-use regimen — akin to a drought emergency — by 2012, when a 35 percent reduction of river water would be required.

Cal Am gets about 75 percent of the water for its Peninsula customers from 18 wells along the lower Carmel River.

A 1995 state order said Cal Am has the legal right to only 3,376 acre-feet of river water a year, but over the last 10 years, Cal Am's annual diversion of river water has ranged from 9,538 to 11,178 acre-feet. That's exceeded the company's legal limit by an average of 7,150 acre-feet annually, state officials say.

The cease-and-desist order was triggered by the length of time — 13 years — that the original order has been in effect, and because state wildlife officials now consider the Carmel River watershed to be one of the state's "priority watersheds," said Liz Kanter, spokeswoman for the state water board.

Cal Am's overpumping contributes to low water levels that threaten steelhead and other wildlife in the river corridor, officials say.

Cal Am attorneys contend that the company is meeting the terms of the 1995 order, and actively pursuing water reclamation and supply projects. They also say that the cease-and-desist order's schedule conflicts with mandates of the state Public Utilities Code and actions to protect health and safety.

The company, therefore, will ask for a hearing before the water board.

The company hopes that its rate increases and the Coastal Water Project it is pursuing — construction of a \$200 million regional seawater desalination plant, distribution and storage system to serve the Peninsula — will eventually replace the water currently drawn from the river.

Cal Am spokeswoman Catherine Bowie said the company has already set rates that charge more per water unit for high water users, and its new rate proposal would steepen that price in an effort to drive more water conservation.

"We're already the lowest in the state," she said. "Residents and businesses have done an extraordinary job to save water. The golf courses have pretty much converted to recycled water. We think a 50 percent cutback before a new water supply can feasibly come on line is burdensome to our customers." #

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