

**Toby Goddard and Bill Kocher: Balance, compromise keys to reliable water supply  
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**By Toby Goddard and Bill Kocher**

**Opinion**

The future of California's water supply has been in the forefront of the news these past few weeks. In what some are calling an historic achievement, the legislature recently passed a package of bills aimed at reforming state water policy, rebuilding water infrastructure, and restoring the bay delta ecosystem. Details are beginning to emerge and opinions are beginning to form over the specifics in the package. But one thing is clear: for any agreement to be reached on a topic as complex and charged as is the subject of water in California, it took a lot of compromise by all the varied interests to achieve a balanced plan.

It's not clear what effect these bills will have locally. Here in Santa Cruz, we rely on water from the north coast and San Lorenzo River watersheds to meet our community's water needs. The fact is, we are physically and geographically isolated from the major water systems serving the most populated regions of California. Our major challenge with regard to water supply -- one that we have just experienced again this year -- is dealing with shortages in dry years when flows in local streams and river sources run low.

To address this challenge, the city is pursuing what is known as an Integrated Water Plan, whose approach for providing a reliable water supply parallels several elements of the state's recent agreement, and which also involved much compromise to achieve a balanced plan.

First and foremost is a strong emphasis on conservation and efficient water use. The city has a long-standing commitment to water conservation as a way to manage its existing water resources. As a result, our per capita water use is among the lowest statewide. The state's new plan calls for achieving a 20 percent reduction in per capita water use over the next 10 years.

The city is already far along in this effort, and yet there is actually a good bit more that can be done to increase efficiency of water use in our area, from changing out older plumbing fixtures and appliances to rethinking our outdoor water needs.

The second component of the city's Integrated Water Plan involves temporarily cutting back or "curtailing" water use during prolonged dry periods, similar to what took place with water restrictions this summer. Our community has just demonstrated that such cutbacks can be made without undue sacrifice, risk to the public health and safety, or permanent damage to our landscapes. Under the plan, future cutbacks would not exceed the same 15 percent reduction called for this past season that we all just achieved.

The final part of the Integrated Water Plan, and admittedly the most controversial component, is the development of a modest desalination plant, now being investigated in conjunction with neighboring Soquel Creek Water District. Desalination would provide both the city and the district with the relatively small but drought-proof supply that is needed, in the city's case, to increase our reliability during the most severe drought conditions. Without it, the cutbacks that all customers could face would be much more severe and the hardships far greater than were experienced this year.

Of course, there are some who call into question the need for any new water supply in Santa Cruz, suggesting instead other approaches or alternative ideas, just as there will be some who oppose individual elements of the state's recently approved plan for "rebuilding" California's water system as moving in the wrong direction.

But most will acknowledge that in matters as controversial as water tends to be, there is no perfect solution that satisfies everyone; with so many competing interests, values, and priorities, the best we can hope for is people from different backgrounds to come together to implement this compromise solution that best addresses the basic problem for the majority of the public we serve.

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