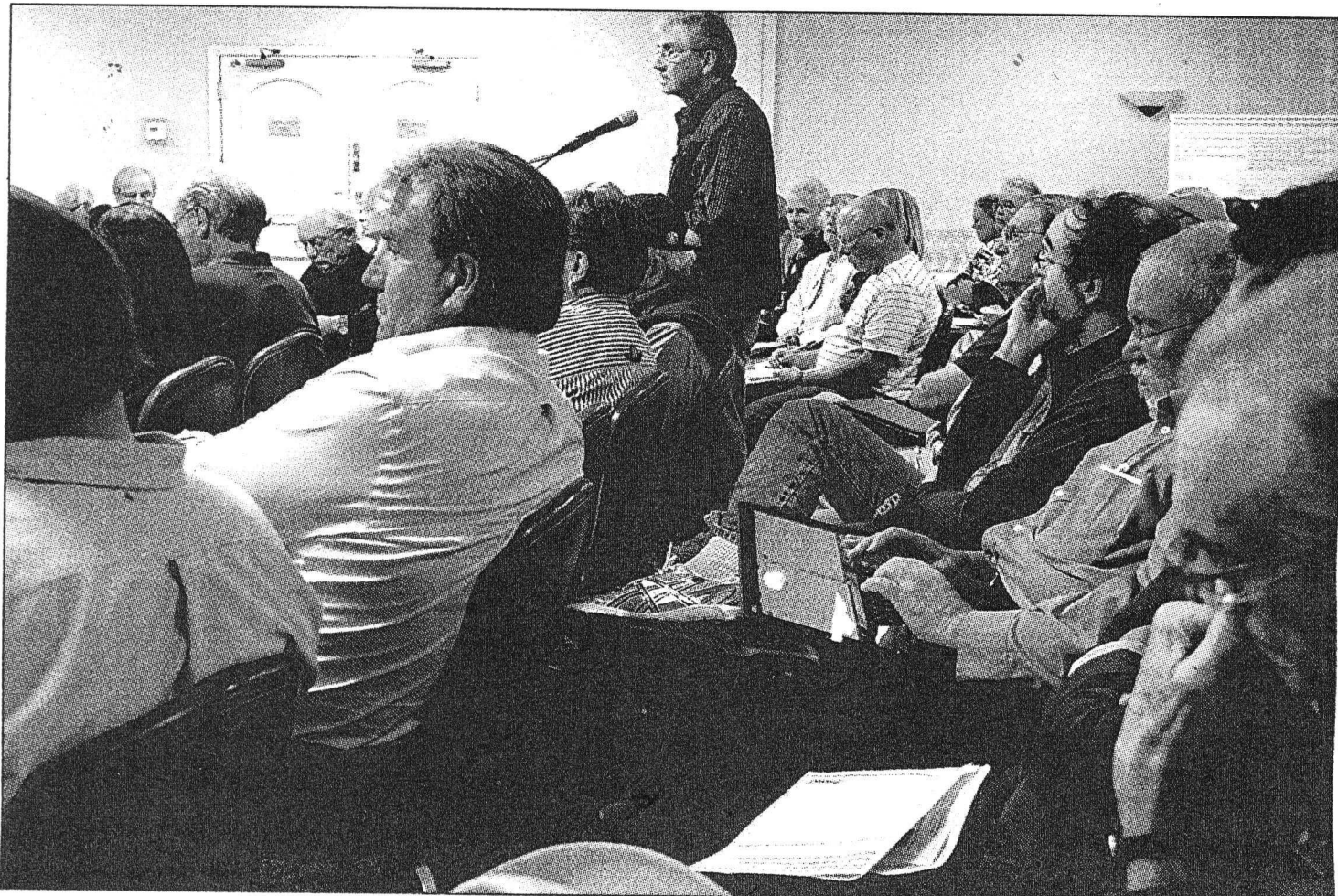


Residents sound off about environmental report

Concern grows about necessity, infrastructure of desalination plant



Santa Cruz resident Tom Manheim, top center, speaks at the Seacliff Inn on Monday afternoon during the public comment session about the draft environmental impact report for the proposed desalination plant. SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

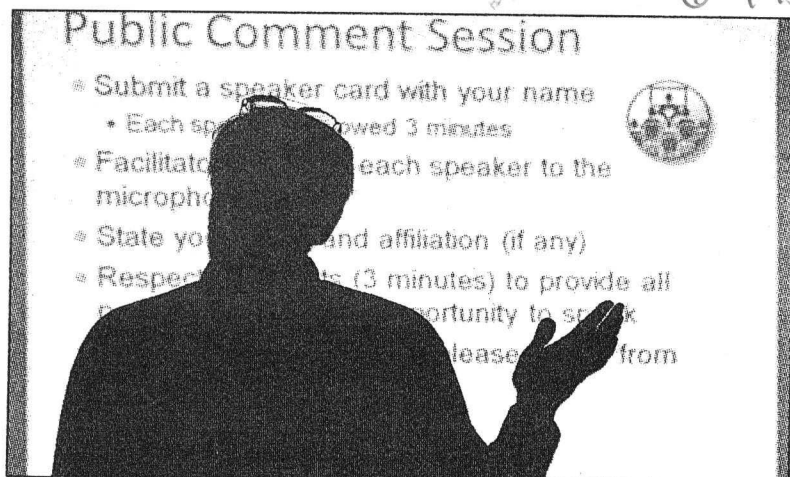
Desalination
NN
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APTOS — Water ratepayers got their first chance Monday to speak out about a critical environmental evaluation of a proposed seawater desalination plant, and for the most part, they came out swinging.

While a few expressed support or neutrality for the \$115 million proposal to create a new water supply for Santa Cruz and neighboring Soquel Creek Water District, many more speakers cited opposition or "skepticism," as some put it.

For 90 minutes at Seacliff Inn, several speakers among the nearly 100 who attended expressed concerns about the accuracy of the state-mandated draft environmental impact report, raising fresh scrutiny about alternatives, cost, growth and potential sites for a pumping station to convey ocean water to the Westside plant.

"I've been here 28 years and seen us get through droughts without a desal plant," Santa Cruz resident Steve Newman said. "Droughts



Rick Longinotti of Santa Cruz Desal Alternatives speaks against the proposed desalination plant and the EIR on Monday. SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

are temporary. We can get through them by using less water. It might be inconvenient, but so is a desal plant."

The plant would provide a new water source for the city during occasional droughts exacerbated by a mandated reduction in stream

diversions for endangered and threatened fish species. More immediately, the facility also would allow the Soquel Creek district to ease pumping from aquifers for 20 years to reverse seawater intrusion.

DESAL

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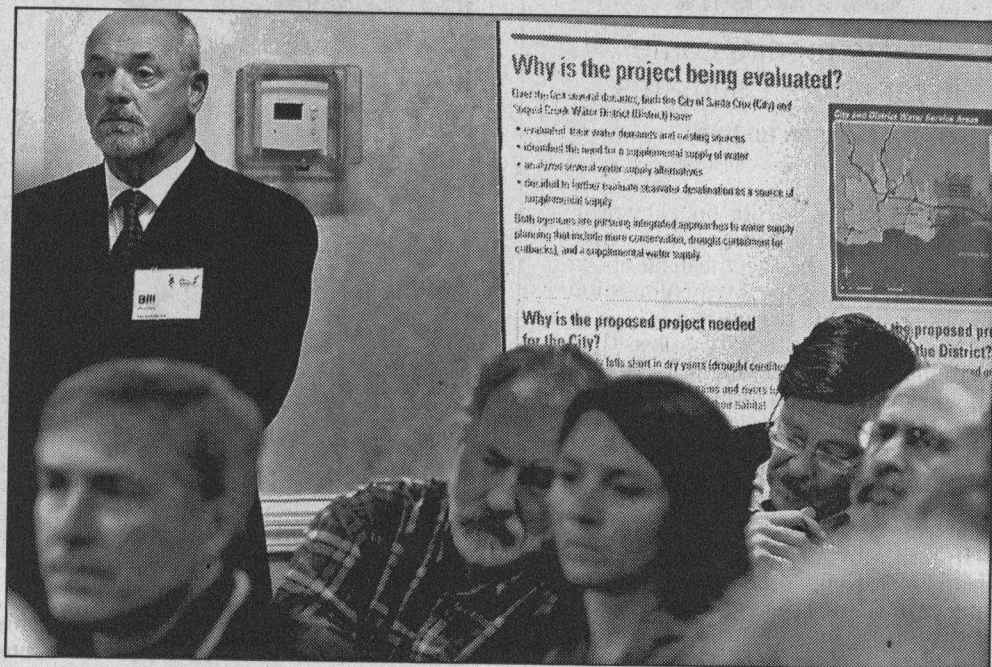
The 2.5 inch-thick environmental document states major impacts can be mitigated, including harm to marine life during intake and high salinity of brine discharge. The report said a host of alternatives studied by the city and district for years won't supply enough water to solve either agency's long-term problems.

The \$1.5 million document presents the City Council and Soquel Creek board numerous options for where the plant and related infrastructure would be built, but drummed up fear among residents about sites abutting Westside neighborhoods. The report also doesn't address exactly how the two agencies will offset high amounts of energy required for removing salt.

However, Tom Manheim of Santa Cruz said the report doesn't thoroughly discuss desalination's positive impacts, including what happens if a plant isn't built and severe drought strikes.

"It does not adequately consider business closures and employment of city residents and the city's ability to provide basic services," Manheim said. "We need to know what the economic consequences would be."

Jim Dixon of Rio del Mar was concerned about Soquel Creek's threatened supply.



Santa Cruz Water Department Director Bill Kocher listens at Monday's desal meeting.

SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

IF YOU GO DESAL EIR MEETING

WHAT: Final meeting to hear comments on the draft environmental impact report for a proposed desalination facility

WHEN: 6:30-9 p.m. July 1

WHERE: First Congregational Church, 900 High St., Santa Cruz

DETAILS: www.scwd2desal.org

"I don't believe we can conserve our way out of it," he said. "There are only so many times we cannot flush the toilet."

Santa Cruz Water Director Bill Kocher said he was not surprised by the tenor of the meeting, adding resi-

dents raised a number of good points.

"The purpose for this meeting necessarily was to provide an opportunity for those who think it is missing something or that something was inadequate or inaccurately covered," Kocher said. "Just

standing up and saying 'well done' is not really appropriate. Therefore, one expects that the comments will be that the EIR needs work."

A second meeting is scheduled for 6:30-9 p.m. July 1 at First Congregational Church, 900 High St., Santa Cruz. Comments, which are due by July 15, will be incorporated into a final document for the Santa Cruz City Council and Soquel Creek board to consider by late 2013 or early 2014.

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