

DAN COYRO/SENTINEL FILE

Two sites at the end of the Santa Cruz wharf are being considered as intake points for the proposed desal plant.

VEIL LIFTED ON PLAN

Desalination
 Desalination report analyzes alternatives, impacts

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By J.M. BROWN
 jbrown@santacruzsentinel.com

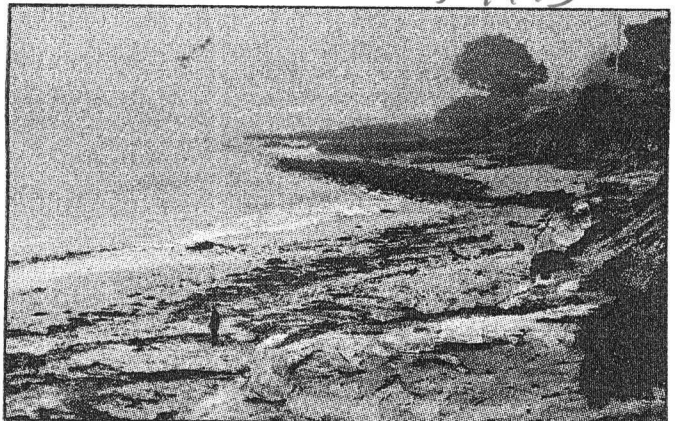
SANTA CRUZ — A draft environmental impact report released Monday for a controversial water supply project reaches two critical conclusions: No alternative to a seawater desalination plant will create or save the water needed by two local agencies, and safeguards built into the design will eliminate all significant harm.

Required by state environmental law, the report explores impacts on marine life, ocean water quality, growth and a host of other issues. The two-part document, which is 2.5-inches thick, also weighs eight main alternatives against the primary objective of creating a reliable supply for Santa Cruz and Soquel Creek Water District in the face of drought, saltwater intrusion, and mandated river and stream flows for fish habitat.

The impacts are classified as nonexistent, less than significant or potentially significant with improvements, referred to as mitigation, assumed to be in place.

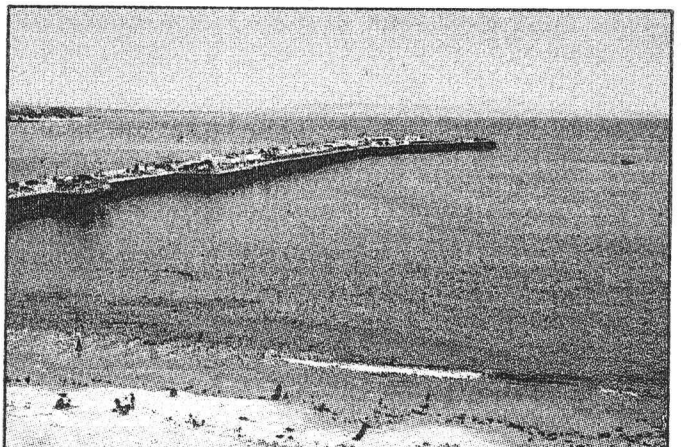
“To make an even stronger design, we

SEE DESAL ON A2



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

Fog shrouds much of Mitchell's Cove on Monday morning near a potential intake for the proposed desalination plant.



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

One of the sites being considered for a water intake point for the proposed desal plant is several hundred feet off the end of the Santa Cruz wharf.

IF YOU GO EIR PUBLIC HEARINGS

FIRST HEARING: Noon-2:30 p.m. June 3,
 Seaciff Inn, 7500 Old Dominion Court, Aptos
SECOND HEARING: 6:30-9 p.m. July 1,
 First Congregational Church, 900 High St.,
 Santa Cruz

DESAL

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made (mitigation) part of the features of the facility," said Melanie Schumacher, public outreach coordinator for the desal project. "It's not something we may choose to do. It's something we are going to do."

Former Santa Cruz County Supervisor Gary Patton, a lawyer for the Community Water Coalition, expects to ask the city and district to grant 90 days of pub-

lic review. Not only is the document massive in size and complexity, the current 60-day comment period comes during a time when few UC Santa Cruz scientists and students will be here and other residents could take vacations.

"This kind of an inquiry, if taken seriously, is something in which people with some technical knowledge should have a real opportunity to look at what has been said, raise questions and contradict anything that is wrong," Patton said.

Schumacher said the agen-

cies already are allowing for 15 days of comment beyond the state-required 45 days and noted no one mentioned before now that 60 days was insufficient.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

The agencies propose building a facility capable of transforming seawater into at least 2.5 million gallons of drinking water each day. The process of stripping salt and organic material from seawater can require at least 5 million gallons of seawater.

Under typical conditions, the city plans to use the facility only during shortages while the district will operate it each day at about half its capacity to replace groundwater supplied by an aquifer that needs resting.

The four biggest environmental factors involve water quality, marine life, energy consumption and population growth. The highly concentrated salt taken from seawater will be mixed with treated wastewater and sent back to Monterey Bay at salinity levels matching the ocean. The discharge pipe will be outfitted with valves that will distribute the salty water evenly to avoid brine plumes.

The intake system will be designed to minimize harm

to marine life that could get pulled into the pipe or caught on its screen. The screen will have openings of just 2mm wide and the velocity of the intake will be lower than that of the ocean.

The high amount of energy required to run the plant — up to 12 times as much as treating traditional water sources — stems largely from the high pressure needed to remove the salt. However, the city and district agreed the plant would be carbon-neutral by adding energy recovery devices to the equipment and buying energy offsets elsewhere.

Patton said he will closely scrutinize what the report says about growth, both how population shapes the need for the plant and whether the plant could in turn spur growth.

"If they say the project doesn't have any impact on growth, they are not disclosing the truth," Patton said. "This is a project that is intended to set the stage for no more constraints on water for growth. If we just manufacture the water when we need it, we don't have to be constrained by water anymore."

The report concludes the city can supply water to exist-

READ THE EIR

Copies of the proposed desalination plant are available to read during regular business hours at:

1. Santa Cruz Water Department, 212 Locust St., Suite C, Santa Cruz
2. Soquel Creek Water District, 5180 Soquel Drive, Soquel
3. Public library branches except Scotts Valley, Watsonville, Felton and Boulder Creek.
4. To download it, visit www.acwd2desal.org.

Public comment will be accepted until 5 p.m. July 15 by email or letter to Heidi Luckenbach, desalination program manager, Santa Cruz Water Department, 212 Locust St., Suite C, Santa Cruz, CA 95060, hluckenbach@cityofsantacruz.com.

ing customers and accommodate growth in water demand during years with normal rainfall, but without the desal plant, supply falls short in dry and seriously dry years for existing customers. The report says the plant won't directly cause or promote residential growth or employment.

ALTERNATIVES

In addition to meeting water supply goals, alternatives are evaluated for environmental feasibility and ability to minimize impacts created by the original proposal.

The document mentions 24 alternatives, only eight of which are explored in detail in the report. The rest, including a new dam, quarry

storage and off-stream diversions, were eliminated after being deemed infeasible.

A plant containing a pilot project for direct potable use of waste water was the only alternative determined to satisfy objectives for both agencies. Direct potable reuse, not yet legal, involves putting treated wastewater directly into the water supply without pumping it offshore or storing underground.

Other alternatives include a project by only the city or district, no project at all for either or a mix of conservation and other measures for each agency. Regional recycled water for irrigation also was considered and found to partially meet the district's needs, but not the city's.