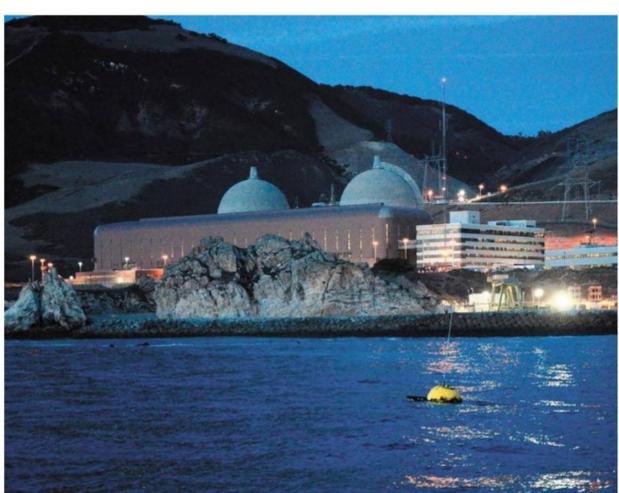


SLO County Board of Supervisors needs to move quickly on desalination plan

HIGHLIGHTS
Board of Supervisors to receive report Tuesday on potential export of Diablo Canyon desal water
Plan would include a pipeline to shore up South County communities' water supply
Government should be funding desalination plants, not bullet trains to nowhere



The San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors will hear a report Tuesday on a plan to expand the desalination plant at the Diablo Canyon Power Plant. **John Lindsey** - Courtesy photo

BY MATTHEW HOY

The two storm systems that passed through San Luis Obispo County last weekend brought needed rain and put us within shouting distance of "normal" rainfall for this point in the year. But the county's and the state's water problems aren't going to be solved by a single El Niño year.

Much of California is a desert. The lush green lawns that adorn the homes of the Hollywood elite in Malibu and Montecito and expansive Palm Springs golf courses are not the natural state of nature.

In the mid-20th century, when politicians cared more about people than baitfish like the delta smelt, dams and reservoirs were built to provide needed water for the Golden State's growing coastal population and farmland in the fertile Central Valley.

Those days are long gone.

Since 2000, California's population has grown by approximately 5 million people. In that time we've created just one new reservoir, **Diamond Valley Lake**, in 2003. And reservoirs only work if there is rain and snowmelt to fill them in the first place.

Despite water being a limited commodity, environmentalists have successfully sued to divert millions of gallons from the drought-stricken Central Valley to the Pacific Ocean in an effort to save the **delta smelt** — a fish of no particular account other than the fact that it appears to continue its efforts at extinction despite the best efforts of humans.

The result? Scarce water, fallow fields, higher food prices and an unemployment rate in the Central Valley nearly 2 points higher than the rest of the state.

There is a technological solution to much of this: Desalination.

Locally, the San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors is scheduled to hear a report this week on a proposal to get desalinated seawater to the South County as soon as next year.

A 7-mile pipeline from the Diablo Canyon Power Plant's desalination facility to the current Lopez Lake pipeline would be a boon to South County communities' water needs, reducing the need to drain the aquifer there. With less water being pulled from deep underground, the potential for saltwater intrusion into the Santa Maria groundwater basin is reduced.

In Morro Bay, officials are looking to possibly expand their desalination plant when the existing wastewater treatment plant is moved inland. If they are able to cut through regulatory red tape, an expanded desalination facility could potentially meet all of Morro Bay's current and future water needs and free up the city's allotment of state water for communities further inland.

In Cambria, the Cambria Community Services District is limited to running its desalination plant only during Stage III water emergencies under an agreement with the state Coastal Commission. This agreement should be changed to allow the plant to run whenever necessary to address the needs of the community.

All of this unfortunately offers little hope to the community of Los Osos, where water restrictions limit the residential use of water to no more than 50 gallons per person per day.

An earlier report to the Board of Supervisors briefly discussed the possibility of running a pipeline from the Diablo Canyon facility north to Los Osos and Morro Bay. The supervisors' focus on a South County pipeline appears to take this plan off the table.

However, if Morro Bay expanded its existing desalination plant and worked with the county to run a pipeline south to Los Osos, we might soon have a situation where, even during extended periods of drought, much of the Central Coast can be insulated from the worst effects.

Local politicians need to act purposefully to overcome the predictable regulatory hurdles and locate additional state and federal funding sources to ensure the water needs of our growing communities are met.

And it's not just here in San Luis Obispo County that we should be agitating for more desalination plants.

We must undertake a statewide effort to meet our water needs. This will not be cheap, but unlike too much of what the state spends its money on, this sort of infrastructure investment will benefit us all for decades to come.

We need politicians who would make desalination their pet cause, rather than a low-ridership, heavily subsidized bullet train to nowhere.

The recent rains should not be cause for our elected leaders to grow complacent. Climate change is unlikely to turn the Central Coast into a tropical paradise with full reservoirs and fertile fields. We need to use our technological resources to adapt.

Conservative writer Matthew Hoy is a former reporter, editor and page designer. His column appears in The Tribune every other Sunday, in rotation with liberal columnist Tom Fulks. Read Hoy's blog at Hoystory.com. Follow him on Twitter @Hoystory.

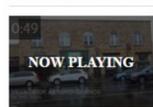


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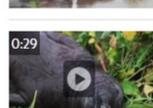
As wet weather hits Arroyo Grande, residents (and roosters) brave the rain



As wet weather hits Arroyo Grande, residents (and roosters) brave the rain



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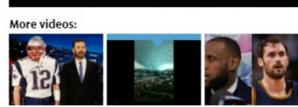
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Mike Morgan · Julian High
Matthew, interesting your mention of Los Osos. Its almost as if the town of Los Osos was never meant to be. There's no vision there, no thought, no rhyme nor reason. Its as if Los Osos has a curse on it. Perhaps its a Chumash curse. There are many Chumash graves in Los Osos.

Los Osos is a sand spit once populated by the Chumash, and so it shall remain. This seems to be the curse of the Chumash on Los Osos...or could it be the curse of a minority of knuckle heads that actually believe that choking the Los Osos water supply down to failing wells will prevent any growth in Los Osos?
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"A stitch in time saves nine"_Ben Franklin
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Gene Nelson · San Luis Obispo, California
Californians for Green Nuclear Power (CGNP dot org) strongly endorses building more desalination plants for California, located near the communities that need more water. It is far more economical to move electrical power than water! These desalination plants should be run with the abundant, reliable, cost-effective power from Diablo Canyon to avoid exacerbating global warming (caused by burning fossil fuels to power desalination plants.)
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