

It Takes a Community

The past five years have caused a shift in our collective understanding of water as a natural resource. The drought years put an emphasis on where water was used, in what quantities, and conservation by both individuals and commercial users.

Have we taken that paradigm shift too far? Are we being too critical of where our water is coming from and how it is being used?

Recent discussions locally on groundwater sustainability and feasibility of desalination have occupied the media comment columns, articles, and mostly the opinion letters. There is a wide range of opinions on water as a resource, and who should be entitled to use it ... and where. Passions are running quite high on these topics!

Are we considering the impacts to our environment and watershed as more homeowners let their yards dry up and become barren earth? Is groundwater recharge an important by-product of agricultural irrigation practices? Can we continue to maintain our hotel room counts because of extreme water conservation requirements and still sustain our local tourism sector, attracting the type of events that fill those rooms?

These are the types of questions we need to address as we look to manage our water resources in the future. Agriculture should be a beneficial use, as growing food fulfills the basic human need to eat three times a day. Tourism supports our economy and diversifies our workforce with multiple opportunities. Ecology needs water to maintain a healthy environment for all species, including those who enjoy our wilderness areas. And a healthy horticultural environment on our Peninsula adds beauty to our daily lives, as well as maintains our image of what tourists seek when coming to the Monterey area.

Too many times we get hung up on the here-and-now and fail to see the bigger picture of our water use. Do we have areas to improve upon yet? Of course. Have we done a lot to improve our water resources for agricultural production? Absolutely. Can we find a solution that provides enough water for the Peninsula so that residents and commercial users can both attain a level of confidence in their supply? We need to.

If we all want to work together as a community to solve these resource questions, we need a focus on the bigger picture solutions, not just what will take care of us today. Terms such as 'replacement water' don't allow for economic growth or expansion for our workforce opportunities. We need to look at providing a much broader and all-encompassing solution to our water worries, one that can take us late into this century so that our children and grandchildren don't face the same arguments we're wrestling with today.

The same discussion can be stated for groundwater sustainability. This can be accomplished without drastic impacts to our agricultural producers, and yes, even find a solution to halt salt water intrusion at the same time. This is a uniquely local issue and should remain so; if we don't solve these issues for ourselves, someone else will, either the state or the courts.

It will take all of us, as a community, to come to consensus on what our plans for water resources should be for the coming decades. To some extent, the state is now forcing on us what we have known for years, even decades, that we have several issues that need to be dealt with directly but conscientiously. Ripple effects of the unintended consequences will have lasting impacts on our way of life as well as our community and economy.

So when hearing or reading about water resources, remember that it takes all of us to work together find solutions, not just Peninsula vs. Salinas Valley, not just north vs. south, and certainly not just growth limiting vs. growth inducing.

As we move forward in the coming months and year towards finding those solutions, please spend time to get all the facts before believing one side or the other. Remember, there are two sides to every story, each with merit, and our community owes it to itself to be vigilant in abiding by all the facts when it comes to water.