



Residents: Keep water in river

Plan to retrofit Hetch Hetchy system draws fire for including upgrades to meet demands

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FREMONT — The water agency delivering 225 million gallons of Yosemite National Park water daily to the Bay Area faces a fight to get 25 million gallons more per day by 2030.

One by one Tuesday night, environmentalists, residents and community activists urged the San Francisco Public Utility Commission to scale back water forecasts and include more conservation and restoration in its \$4 billion effort to retrofit and upgrade the aging Hetch Hetchy water system.

Charge more for the water, they said. Use less. Get it from the Delta. But just keep it in the river.

"I'm concerned," said Fremont resident Justine Burt, testifying with her son, Matthew Cocca. "Why are we not talking about more aggressive water conservation measures instead of diverting a water source? ... If water was priced a little higher, people would treat it more carefully."

The Hetch Hetchy system delivers water from its famously pure reservoir in Yosemite National Park to 2.4 million people in San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara and southern Alameda counties. The Tuolumne River provides 85 percent of the 265 million gallons of water the agency delivers daily.

By 2030 the agency expects it will need 300 million gallons a day to meet demand. Part of that increase — 10 million gallons a day — will come from increased conservation and other sources, such as wells. The rest, the utility says, must come from the Tuolumne.

The projections are wrapped up in the agency's massive effort to harden the system against earthquakes. With some key facilities nearly 100 years old, officials fear a major shaker could leave swathes of the Bay Area facing severe water rationing for months.

That coupling has some water managers nervous, as objections over increased water draws could delay much-needed retrofits that face no opposition.

"We strongly urge the long-overdue" retrofit, said Douglas Chun, manager of water supply and quality for the Alameda County Water District, which supplies Fremont,

Newark and Union City and gets 30 percent of its supply from Hetch Hetchy. "The fault is moving."

Indeed, it was the prospect of a protracted fight, in part, that pushed General Manager Susan Leal earlier this week to recommend against the retrofit's most controversial item: A fourth pipeline, kept in reserve for emergencies, to carry Tuolumne River water across the Central Valley.

That promised a huge fight, with a corresponding price tag. Instead, Leal said the same goals can be met with a more modest 9-mile bypass at a key juncture.

A final decision on the matter will come next month, but at a meeting earlier Tuesday, no commissioner objected, said commission spokesman Tony Winnicker.

Another concern for environmentalists is a lack of specific environmental restoration projects in the blueprint.

For instance, as the utility rebuilds Calaveras Dam on Alameda Creek, advocates with Alameda Creek Alliance want to see a commitment to restore the creek's struggling steelhead and rainbow trout populations.

"There's no stewardship component," said Jeff Miller, the alliance's director. "Engineers have a firm hold of the Water System Improvement Plan at this point. We've got to get the biologists involved."

Winnicker promised those details will come later, after the current series of public sessions better maps environmental concerns. Commissioners, he added, are well aware of their stewardship responsibilities and have added \$250 million to their spending plan specifically for environmental restoration and mitigation.

The scoping sessions continue next week, with a public hearing Tuesday in Palo Alto and again on Wednesday in San Francisco.