

# **NEW REPORT SHOWS DESALINATION IS COSTLIEST WATER SUPPLY OPTION FOR COASTAL BEND REGION**

## **Analysis Highlights Reliable, Safer, More Affordable Alternatives Including Groundwater, Conservation and Evaporation Prevention**

### **Report Shows Manufacturing Accounted for Nearly 70% of Regional Growth in Demand for Water Over Past Decade**

Corpus Christi, TX – A new analysis conducted by Autocase Economic Advisory reveals that desalination plants proposed by the City and Port of Corpus Christi are by far the costliest water supply option for the region.

The report details, for the first time, the projected financial, environmental and social costs of proposed desalination plants in the Corpus Christi Bay system as compared to other viable options, including accessing groundwater, expanding conservation measures, and exploring evaporation prevention through the use of floating solar panels.

The new report finds that the total cost of each of the three desalination facilities proposed by the City and Port would be roughly double that of tapping into groundwater from the Evangeline Aquifer – an approach that neither the City or Port has fully explored – and expanding water conservation strategies.

The report also explores options for decreasing evaporation in reservoirs the region already relies on for water by utilizing floating solar panels, as is currently being done by the Army's Fort Bragg. While the expense of pursuing this approach on a large scale is substantial, it offers the only net positive cost scenario outlined in the report.

Most significantly, the Autocase report provides new insight into the growth of the region's demand for water, and details the anticipated environmental and social cost of proposed desalination facilities.

The report reveals that manufacturing, especially petrochemical refining, has driven most of the regional growth in demand for water over the past decade, accounting for 69.7% of the region's increase in water use between 2010 and 2020. Growth over the same period in municipal water use – which includes households, commercial uses, fire protection, public recreation, and sanitation – totaled just 5.6%.

The report additionally shows that the Baywater desalination plants proposed by the City and Port would have potentially devastating environmental and social costs. These include negative impacts to local commercial fisheries resulting from the discharge of brine and increase in salinity levels in the Bay system. The report indicates that the impact of Baywater desalination plants on just six key fish species could cost the region up to \$6 million per year.

The Autocase report also notes that the proposed desalination plants would require up to 5 times the energy use of the alternative approach of utilizing groundwater and expanding conservation.

“The future of water supply in the Coastal Bend is a transformational decision with decades of significant costs and environmental impacts at stake. Water users alike should be interested in more comprehensive

analysis of water supply options to make the most informed decisions possible, accounting for fiscal, community, and environmental impacts. This should be especially true for the City and Port of Corpus Christi as project sponsors.” said Eric Bill, Chief Economist with Autocase Economic Advisory. “The Environmental Protection Agency is now telling them that the proposed desalination plants would have major impacts on the regional water system, which requires a detailed look at less damaging alternatives. The Autocase study released today is the most thorough review to date of less damaging alternatives and makes it perfectly clear that there are other reliable, drought-proof supply options less costly and detrimental than the proposed desalination plants.”

“In 2017 and 2018 the Corpus Christi City Council let Exxon and Steel Dynamics have the water that was supposed to be the region’s drought cushion,” said Errol Summerlin, a co-founder of the Coastal Alliance to Protect our Environment. “Now they’ve spent years trying to persuade the public that desalination is the best way to solve the problem that they themselves created. But the truth is that desalination isn’t needed to ensure an adequate water supply for residents – it’s only necessary for big corporations, and it’s also the costliest option by far. Coastal Bend families should be outraged by this ongoing farce and demand that the City and Port change course immediately.”

“The Port and the City, as well as the candidates running for the Corpus Christi City Council, should look long and hard at this report,” said Neil McQueen with Surfrider Foundation. “This is the only available detailed accounting of the benefits and drawbacks of all the viable alternatives. The report makes it obvious that tapping into groundwater and expanding conservation would be reliable, safer and more affordable than desalination, and that evaporation prevention with floating solar panels is an idea that merits serious consideration. We need to take action right now to protect both our pocketbooks and the Corpus Christi Bay, and this new report shows that there is a way to do both.”

“We have been fighting permits that the City of Corpus Christi and the Port are seeking for desalination in our precious Bay,” said Patrick Nye with Ingleside on the Bay Coastal Watch Association. “We just had a hearing with the Port and the state environmental agency yesterday on one of these permits. I hope this study spurs the community and the decision-makers to choose a safer, sustainable and more affordable alternative that provides the water we need, not a firehose for even more industrial growth to pollute our region with harmful emissions.”

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