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Seawater Project Leaps Forward

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Cost allocation committee gives it unanimous approval

A plan to prevent seawater from entering groundwater supplies cleared a major hurdle Thursday, moving it further toward an election. The Salinas Valley Water Project on Thursday received unanimous approval by a 19-member cost allocation advisory committee of growers, shippers and public officials. "Their charge was to work out what the costs and benefits of this project would be," said Alex Hulanicki, a spokesman for the project. "They've been hashing this out for nearly two years."

Next, the plan goes before a second committee Nov. 25 on its way to the Monterey County Board of Supervisors. On Jan. 7, the board will set a date for Salinas Valley property owners to vote on the project via mail-in ballot. The \$18 million project aims to prevent seawater from entering underground aquifers in the Salinas Valley. It calls for the construction of a rubber dam on the Salinas River near Marina and increased releases of water in the valley from Lakes Nacimiento and San Antonio, outside Lockwood.

If passed, the project would cost property owners up to \$23.97 per acre annually, or between \$4 to \$6 per quarter acre. The cost for properties smaller than a quarter acre is yet to be decided, Hulanicki said.

The Salinas City Council on Tuesday unanimously supported the plan, proposed by the Monterey County Water Resources Agency.

What's next?

The Monterey County Water Resources Agency will hold public workshops at 1 p.m. Dec. 2 and 9 a.m. Dec. 19 in the agency's boardroom, 893 Blanco Circle, Salinas.