

End nears for storm runoff dispute

By LARRY PARSONS
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A long environmental battle over storm runoff into ocean waters off the Monterey Peninsula is close to over, though several local jurisdictions could still challenge details of the antipollution program.

In September, regional water quality officials blessed a storm-water management plan hammered out between the Natural Resources Defense Council and seven local agencies—Monterey County and the cities of Monterey, Pacific Grove, Seaside, Sand City, Del Rey Oaks and Marina.

“That was a step in the right direction for protecting Monterey Bay,” said Anjali Jaiswal, a staff attorney for the resources council.

But the local jurisdictions, which argued the costs of the storm-water program could be very high to local residents, asked the state Water Resources Control Board to take another look at the management plan.

Jaiswal said the local agencies were challenging two key parts of the program, one designed to protect highly valued ocean called “areas of special biological significance” and another requiring maximum effort to protect water quality.

“The appeal was a step in the wrong direction,” she said.

Last week, the state water board’s acting executive director denied the local jurisdictions’ request for a new hearing.

Jaiswal praised that decision.

“It tells midsized areas that they must put forth maximal efforts and protect water quality,” she said.

Deborah Mall, city attorney for Monterey, said the resources council was overstating the scope of the points still at issue. She said the agencies wanted clarification on design standards for how to limit pollutants from entering “receiving waters.”

“We’ve been trying to work this out with the regional board,” she said. “We don’t know how to implement it.”

Mall said the local agencies’ next appeal step would be to go to court. But she said they hope to resolve the matter without taking that step.

“I think we are halfway to figuring it out,” she said.

Jaiswal said, “I hope they focus their efforts on implementing this plan to stop urban runoff.”