

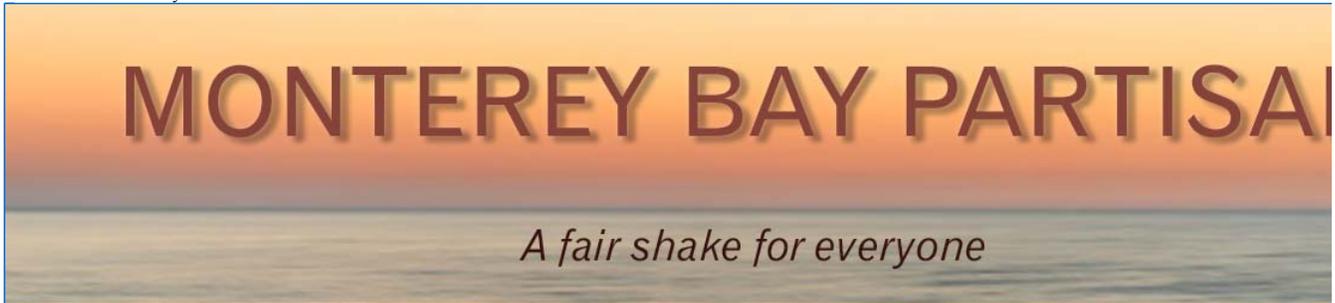
## Water Bill Too High?

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### [PUC experts finally track down the elusive Ag Land Trust wells](#)

by Royal Calkinson December 16, 2015

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Consultants working for the California Public Utilities Commission and Cal Am Water stand around a well that the could have sworn does not exist

Q: How many fellows representing the [Public Utilities Commission](#) does it take to look at a well?

A: Four, if this week's visit to the [Ag Land Trust](#) well is an indication. One to say, "Look, there it is." Another to say, "Yup, that is a well, isn't it?" A third to say, "Looks like a well to me." And the fourth to say, "Hmm."

Readers who pay close attention to water issues locally may remember the stories in May about how the people preparing an environmental impact report on the Cal Am desalination project had reported that there were no wells on the Ag Land Trust property adjacent to the Cemex plant where Cal Am plans to located its desal facility.

Attorney Marc Del Piero of the Ag Land Trust argues that the pumping at the desalination plant would infringe on the groundwater rights of other property owners in the area and would accelerate seawater intrusion, threatening farms in the area.

Although there are two wells on the Ag Land Trust property, the consulting firm [Environmental Science Associates](#) wrote in the draft environmental impact report that such concerns were invalid and, as to support that position, declared that there are no such wells.

In response, Del Piero switched on the pump at one of the wells, producing a cascade of water that made for a terribly amateurish but relatively interesting video clip on the Partisan website.

You can see the clip and read the history [here](#).

Tuesday, ESA representatives and others got a guided tour of the wells as they work on an environmental impact report to replace the original version. Draft No. 1 wasn't tossed out because of the missing wells but because one of the key hydrologists working on the first study turned out to have a sizable conflict of interest. He was being paid to assess the type of wells Cal Am intends to use even though he holds patents on the technology.



Eric Zigas of Environmental Science Associates listens to Peninsula water activist Michael Baer

Among those getting his feet muddy at the Ag Land Trust property on Tuesday was Chuck Cech, the retired engineer who first spotted that conflict. He mentioned that he has some new concerns about the methodology being used to test the water being pumped by the Cal Am test well at the Cemex property.

The fellow heading the EIR process for ESA, Eriz Zigas, was one of those who was nodding Tuesday about the existence of the wells. He wrote a nice note Wednesday to Del Piero and the Ag Land Trust's Sherwood Darrington:

"I wanted to thank you both for taking the time yesterday, to escort me and members of the MPWSP (Monterey Peninsula Water Supply Project) CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act) Team onto your property in Marina, for the expressed purpose of viewing the Big Well and the small well. It was a useful and helpful visit. It was important for us to learn about your preservation and restoration activities, and it certainly was a surprise to see so many other interested parties at the walk through!"

You'll notice he said "surprise" but not "pleasant surprise."

{ 10 comments... [add one](#) }

- [George Riley](#) December 16, 2015, 12:54 pm

Cal Am's test slant well and the EIR has as many holes as the perforations in the well casing. Plugging the holes and finding the elusive ALT well will not fix the charade. What Cal Am proposed and what has political support is not what exists. Ratepayers are being fed a yarn. It sounds good, but it is shoddy and false.

[ReplyLink](#)

- [Ron Weitzman](#) December 16, 2015, 2:55 pm

You got that right, George, and I would add illegal and fraudulent.

[ReplyLink](#)

- [Alan Estrada](#) December 16, 2015, 3:49 pm

'Collusion' is lexicographically stated and defined as "A secret agreement between two or more parties for a fraudulent, illegal, or deceitful purpose [American Heritage Dictionary, 3rd edition, 1992]. The O.E.D. defines 'collusion' as 1. Secret agreement or understanding for nefarious purposes; conspiracy, fraud, trickery. To 'collude' means 1. Conspire, plot, connive; act in secret concert [The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, 1993]. I checked Cal Am's stock price today (American Water Works—AWK stock) and it is on the up-n-up-n-up. Our public rate-payers are getting drilled from behind and being bled dry, after all, "scarcity makes profits." Just ask any East Coast investor looking west. How else is it that AWK (Cal Am parent) stock keeps rising? Locally we may say that it is in part due to 'calamopoly', to play off the board game and word 'monopoly', which is my next political cartoon (on the drawing table): CALAMOPOLY. Looking forward to

what our kindred Marc d. P. might have to say about this, as well as our thoughtful Mayor Jason Burnett of Carmel who heads a local water agency. (Royal reporting Mr. Caulkins.)

[ReplyLink](#)

- Stephen CollinsDecember 16, 2015, 8:55 pm

I find it curious that Zigas referred to the wells as “preservation and restoration” which, of course, would fall outside of CEQA. The “big” well is a 2000 gallon a minute full production well capable of irrigating the entire Agland Trust property with the assistance of boost from the “small well”. These full capacity wells are fully capable of irrigation but are currently being rendered damaged by Cal Am sucking the fresh water out from under the Agland Trust property and inducing seawater intrusion in its place. Now that the PUC has seen the contiguous wells they will simply denigrate them as something other than what they are and arrogantly move the flawed EIR forward.

[ReplyLink](#)

- Jeanne TurnerDecember 16, 2015, 9:23 pm

Ah, that elusive purple pump, found at last. Thank you “interested parties” for helping out. ESA could never have done it without you.

[ReplyLink](#)

- Stephen CollinsDecember 16, 2015, 10:02 pm

As I am sure you know, nothing elusive about the purple pump and pipe. The Agland Trust and 12,000 acres of other north County land owners paid tens of millions of dollars to irrigate with recycled water to halt seawater intrusion. Cal Am is in the process of undoing years of effort to halt basin degradation with one massive slant well designed, by its own admission, to create a cone of depression and suck in seawater.

[ReplyLink](#)

- Stephen CollinsDecember 16, 2015, 10:18 pm

One final thought on the elusive production wells on the Agland Trust property. Since 2006, the Trust and Del Piero have written numerous letters to the PUC, the SWRCB, the County of Monterey, 3 different Court venues, the State Attorney General, the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board, local Senators and Assembly members, the MCWD, the MCWRA, FORA and Donald Trump (OK, maybe not Trump) but damn well anyone who would listen and all public documents. Yet somehow, Cal Am, the PUC and their consultants managed to miss them entirely. The fact you can see them from Highway 1 should not have been a giveaway. Contiguous property requires special CEQA review status, I am certain this never entered the consultants minds. Just an innocent oversight.

[ReplyLink](#)

- Alan EstradaDecember 16, 2015, 11:01 pm

CAL AM (AWK stock) shareholders, material workers, and knowledge workers ought to be embarrassed to their pumping core, straight to their beating, questionable hearts. This wetland exposure, had it been cited before the last election round, might have been the fulcrum point that would have tipped and allowed Measure O to pass. Press on Partisan! The admirable public effort at large is not in vain. It is the vanity of Cal Am that ought to be slaughtered, as the monsters they are. David vs. Go Lie Us....

[ReplyLink](#)

- Janet CollinsDecember 17, 2015, 9:30 am

And the only thing one reads in the Herald from Jim Johnson is whatever press release that Cal Am hands him..He wouldn't dare ask an investigative question...Cal Am spends too much money at the paper...And, for the most part, the only thing that the folks on the Peninsula know in terms of their mass media is what they see printed in the Pine Cone, Weekly, (at least they do a little digging), and the Herald...And it's all PR, BS handed out by Cal Am...Thanks to the Partisan for the no holds barred look at the situation...

[ReplyLink](#)

- bill leoneDecember 20, 2015, 2:08 pm

We, the rate payers, are being financially abused by a klepto-cratc corporation, & our local officials are their accomplices. The fact that local newspapers & media are not taking a strong stand to reveal the extent of Cal Am's rapacity & mendacity is a sign of just how badly the deck is stacked against (us) the public. For a long time I hoped The Weakly would take a stand, but I was, & am, greatly disappointed. Perhaps someone from The Weakly will read this & actually do some substantive journalism.

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