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- [HOME](#)
- [DESAL 101](#)
- [NEWS](#)
- [ENVIRONMENTAL](#)
- [FAQS](#)
- [ABOUT US](#)
- [CONTACT](#)

HOME - NEWS

Media

\$1 Billion Desalination Plant, Hailed as as Model for State

Los Angeles Times

Carlsbad, CA (December 15, 2015) - With Monday's ceremonial opening of the Western Hemisphere's largest ocean desalination plant, a new era began for water use in San Diego County — and possibly for the entire parched state. California officials have been emphasizing water conservation, expansion of reservoirs and water recycling (irrigating landscapes with partially treated wastewater and even turning sewage into drinking water) as prime ways to survive the drought, which is about to enter its fifth year.

But seawater desalination has remained a minor part of the water supply puzzle. If the new facility in Carlsbad performs according to expectations, that could change. About 15 other desalination sites are being proposed in the state.

More than 600 dignitaries gathered at the site overlooking the Pacific Ocean to mark the occasion. Tributes came from elected officials such as Assembly Speaker Toni Atkins (D-San Diego). She highlighted the bipartisan support for the project, including backing by Assemblyman Rocky Chavez (R-Oceanside), whose district includes the plant.

"We've now established a model, not just for San Diego County but for other plants up and down the coastline, so that we can make sure California's future is bright and that we have the water we need," Atkins said.

Its official opening, tied to meeting certain performance standards, is expected in days. The plant is capable of producing 50 million gallons of fresh water daily, about 10% of the county's total water use.

Poseidon Water of Boston owns and operates the structure, which it built for \$1 billion. The San Diego County Water Authority, the region's main water manager, is buying the desalinated water under a 30-year purchase agreement.

Called the Claude "Bud" Lewis Carlsbad Desalination Plant, the site is named for the late Carlsbad civic leader and mayor who was a major supporter of the project and once served as the water authority's chairman.

Over the years, the project also drew key support from a range of business leaders and labor unions.

It was opposed by various environmental groups, notably the Surfrider Foundation. These critics said desalination harms the environment and costs far more than water that is available from other sources.

Having failed to stop the Carlsbad plant, the environmentalists are trying to block Poseidon's next desalination project, planned for Huntington Beach.

The Carlsbad project has been overseen by Poseidon Vice President Peter MacLaggan, who was on hand Monday to celebrate completion of an undertaking that he spent nearly 15 years developing. Despite the drought, San Diego County doesn't need the desalinated water right away.

The water authority actually has an excess of water this year because residents have curtailed use in response to Gov. Jerry Brown's conservation mandate and the county has a guaranteed supply of water imported from Imperial Valley.

FOR THE RECORD

An earlier version of this story stated that Poseidon Water was based in Stamford, Conn. It is a Boston company. Also, it was stated that Poseidon Vice President Peter MacLaggan has been overseeing the project in Carlsbad and another in Huntington Beach. He has been heading only the

Carlsbad project.

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Posted on Tue, December 15, 2015 by T. Whipple

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