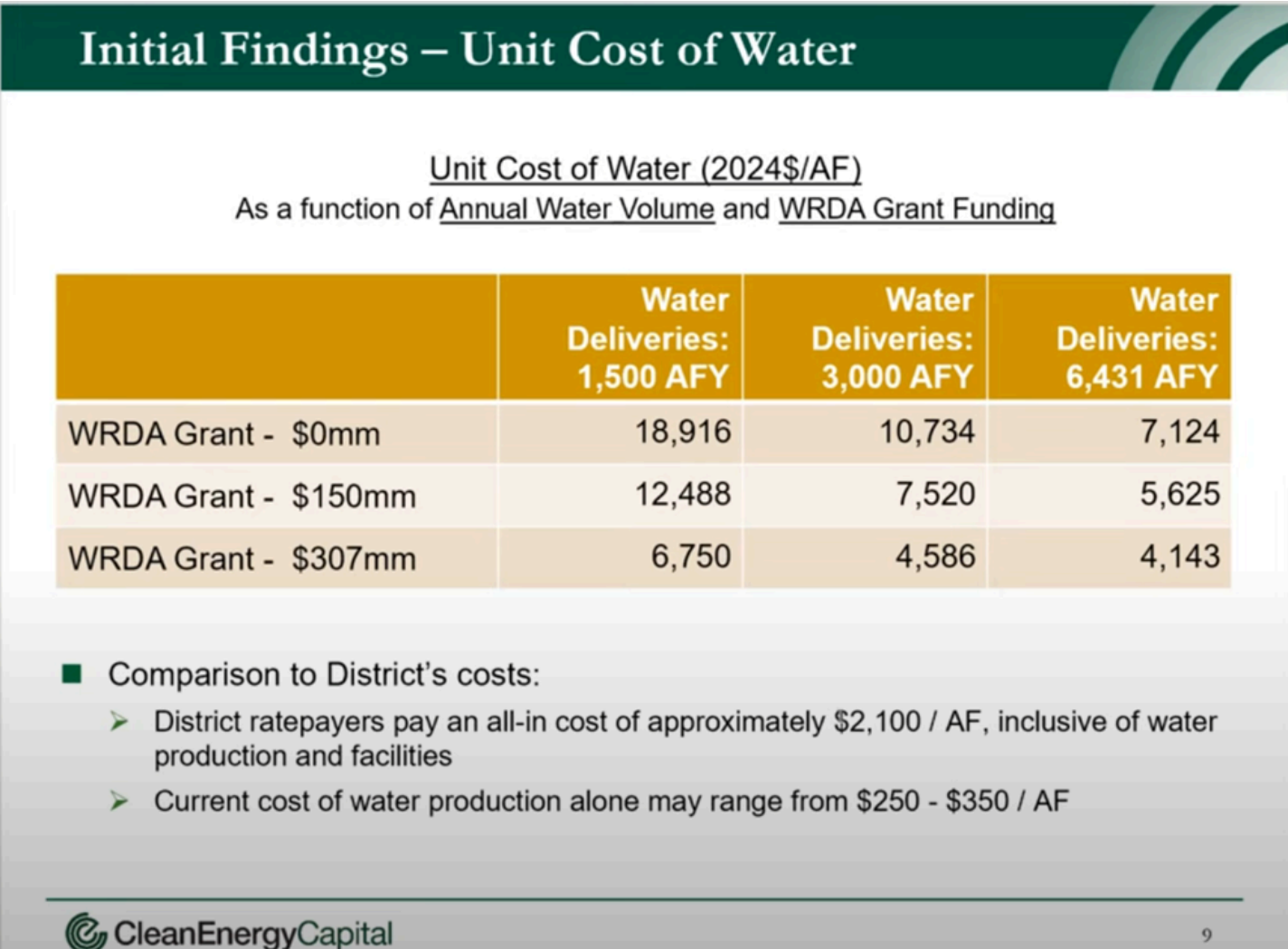


Tripling water costs? Water District discusses cost study of GA’s imported water pipeline

By Michael Smit For The Daily Independent
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A slide from Clean Energy Capital’s presentation at the Water District board meeting on June 1.
YouTube screenshot















The Indian Wells Valley Groundwater Authority’s responsibility is to bring the IWW groundwater basin into sustainability to ensure the future of water for this valley. At the moment, IWVGA’s primary plan for sustainability is to construct a pipeline and import water

from Antelope Valley.

The IWV Water District is responsible for serving water at an appropriate cost to IWV residents. This difference in missions has led to conflict between the two agencies, as IWVGA's sustainability mission will almost certainly raise costs for the Water District's ratepayers.

How much will the costs increase? In March 2024, the Water District approved a measure to pay Clean Energy Capital to complete a cost study on building and operating a pipeline, as well as the cost of purchasing water from Antelope Valley. At the Water District board meeting on June 10, Clean Energy Capital provided their findings in a presentation to the Water District.

David Moore of Clean Energy Capital emphasized multiple times that the study examines the cost of the imported water project, not necessarily the cost that will be passed on to the Water District's ratepayers.

Even so, the safe assumption is that the bill for Water District ratepayers will go up substantially if the imported water pipeline project goes into action. The Water District is the primary water pumper in the IWV, and costs to the Water District flow down to the ratepayers.

According to the Clean Energy Capital's presentation, the cost of acquiring water in IWV could double or even triple in the IWV, and those are the best case scenarios under the imported water project.

The presentation covered a range of potential outcomes, from no grants to maximum grant funding and from minimal water importing to maximum water importing.

Actual costs remain uncertain as IWVGA sorts details of water sustainability, but the true number likely lies in the middle. No grant funding is very unlikely, but IWVGA is not certain of attaining the maximum of \$307 million either. At the moment, they expect to receive \$150 in grant funding for constructing the pipeline.

In addition, it's unlikely that they will import the maximum amount of water, as the IWV basin still has some amount of safe yield which the Water District can pump from.

Therefore, the all-in cost of water will likely raise from \$2,100 per acre foot of water today to \$7,520 per acre foot of water with the imported water project, which—according to the Clean Energy Capital presentation—is the cost for water if IWVGA receives the \$150 million grant and imports 3,000 afy per year.

Water District board members and members of the public were alarmed at the numbers.

“If this pipeline gets forced upon us, which the GA is intently interested in doing, we could see the cost of our water rise by 3 times or more what it is right now,” said member of the public Mike Neel. “That’s an economy crippler.”

Water District board member Chuck Griffin said, “It scares me to death, to be honest with you.”

Water District board member Stan Rajtora—who previously served as the Water District representative on the IWVGA board—expressed gratitude at finally having a clear cost analysis on the project.

“I can remember two years ago when I was on the GA board, one of the things I tried over and over again to get a good cost analysis of the pipeline,” Rajtora said. “I think if we had had the right numbers back then we might not have spent \$7.6 million of California grant money on this Pipeline and we might have actually used it to do something useful for our valley.”

The Water District now has two immediate goals which the board stated at the meeting. First is to present this cost analysis study to the IWVGA. The second is to use the study to determine the actual expected costs directly to Water District ratepayers.