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Long Beach water projects get federal funding

By Paul Eakins, Staff Writer

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LONG BEACH - The Long Beach Water Department's seawater desalination and water recycling projects have received a surge of federal funding that will bring them closer to completion.

Water Department officials announced last week that the projects will receive $1.3 million in federal funding.

The U.S. Senate voted last week to approve the $33.5 billion 2010 fiscal year Energy and Water Appropriations Conference Report, which includes $670,000 for the Long Beach Seawater Desalination Project and $634,000 for the Long Beach Reclaimed Water Expansion Project. The bill was approved two weeks ago by the U.S. House of Representatives and will now go to President Obama to be signed into law.

The water projects, which are still in the research phase, could eventually become an independent water source for Long Beach, reducing the city's dependance on imported water.

"With these funds, we will now be able to complete the third and final phase of our Seawater Desalination Research and Development Project," Kevin Wattier, General Manager of the Long Beach Water Department, said in a statement. "We will also be able to continue to expand the city's use of recycled water, which reduces our consumption of potable water, and makes Long Beach less dependent on outside sources of water, which as everyone knows are becoming more and more unreliable."

With the addition of the new appropriations, Long Beach's water projects will have received $11.4 million for desalination and $12.4 million for water recycling in federal funding since 2000, according to spokesman Matthew Veeh.

Veeh said the third phase of the desalination plant research and development will be completed by the end of next year and then a full-scale plant will be built.

The cost of building the plant would be "tens of millions of dollars" and would cost about $1 million per year to operate, Veeh said. The cost savings from having a new water source would make up for the operating costs, he said.

The recycled water project, which is designed to get more reused water to schools, parks and the Port of Long Beach, is

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earlier in its research and development process, Veeh said.

paul.eakins@presstelegram.com , 562-499-1278

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