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SPOTLIGHT

## Water shortages force Falcon Cove to look for alternatives

A six-month moratorium on new connections

By Brenna Visser The Daily Astorian Jan 16, 2019



Construction workers build a home in the Falcon Cove area south of Cannon Beach.

Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

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Clatsop County won't issue building permits for the next six months in Falcon Cove while the local water district tries to figure out how to solve a water shortage.

The Falcon Cove Beach Water District voted for a six-month moratorium at the end of December on new water connections in the unincorporated community south of Arch Cape after facing periodic shortages.

For the past three years, water production has been at record low levels during the late summer months, with flows as low as 30 gallons per minute — a rate that does not adequately supply the system's reservoirs.

"If this rate went lower or was sustained over several days it would significantly impact the system's ability to supply water," according to a memo from the water district.

So far, the moratorium has only impacted two people hoping to build homes . But in the long term, the situation is forcing the water district to look for alternatives. The county is also reconsidering how the water district can prove properties can be served by enough water.

The issue in Falcon Cove was presented last week to the county Board of Commissioners. Some commissioners see access to water as a long-term challenge for several special districts across the county, especially as the population in rural areas continues to grow.

Commissioner Kathleen Sullivan said many people who live on the coast don't think there is a water shortage.

"This brings home the reality that, yes, water is our concern also, and that we need to be mindful of that," she said.

## Exploring alternatives

Water shortages in Falcon Cove can mainly be attributed to record low flows from the area's main spring and increased development, according to a water district memo. The last long-term plan, done in 2004, projected the water district would be fully built out at 147 homes. Now, the district expects 220 homes.



Establishing water service to new homes in the Falcon Cove area has been problematic.

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The dramatic growth in homes being used as vacation rentals is also contributing to the problem. Vacation rentals have brought a significant increase in demand during the time of year with the least amount of water.

An engineering study in September showed the system would not be sustainable if the area was fully built out, said Charles Dice, the secretary and system operator for the water district's board.

The water district is exploring different ways to offer alternatives to people interested in building during the moratorium. One option is trucking in water and storing it in holding tanks.

"I wanted to come up here and kind of lobby for our lot owners," Dice told county commissioners. "As a water board, we feel really badly we can't give them the water connection they need."

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## Long-term approach

The county has reservations about approving alternative systems during the moratorium, particularly because there is no requirement for property owners to connect to the water district's system once it is lifted.

"It's just better planning practice," Gail Henrikson, the county's community development director, said in reference to having homes all be part of one water system.

Another concern is the water district's proposal to use holding tanks and trucked-in water. The county already has a number of water alternatives on the books, Henrikson said.

But before any building permits can be approved, the county and water district will have to come to a new agreement.

Currently, the county requests a letter from the water district guaranteeing enough water for a new development. In order for alternatives to work, this checks-and-balances method needs to be more flexible, Henrikson said, so that homeowners seeking to use alternative systems like rain catchment or a well can prove to the county their system meets county code.

As of now, there is no way to verify through the county or the water district whether the holding tank system would comply with county code.

"What we're looking for is something that documents they can meet our code of 250 gallons a day," Henrikson said.

Dice argues that holding tanks and rain catchment systems are similar, but that the tanks offer more reliability.

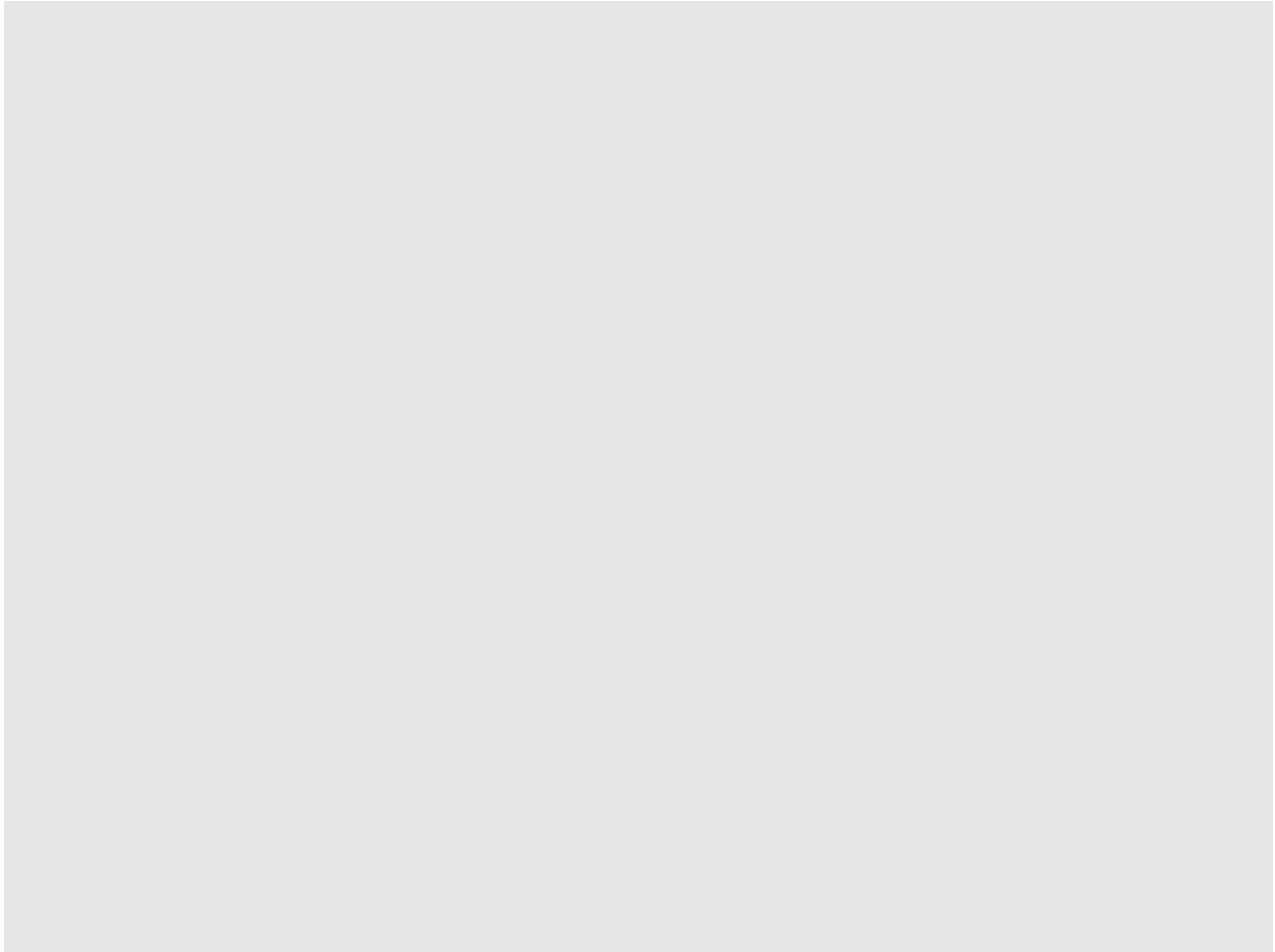
"As an engineer, I don't see a big difference between this and a rainwater system, especially in these drought years the last three years," Dice continued. "I would much rather call someone up and have someone deliver my water rather than sit around and pray to the rain Gods and hope that it rains."

In the meantime, the water district has passed a water conservation ordinance and commissioned a well feasibility study to identify new sources.

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But water availability needs to stay on the commission's to-do list, Commissioner Pamela Wev said.

"This is an issue I bet isn't going to go away," she said. "And it'd be really terrific if we could begin to do some thinking on the long term."



Fresh water is an issue in Falcon Cove.

Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

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