

THE DAILY NEWS

# LOCAL NEWS

## Hetch Hetchy costs to get review

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Independent auditors will be hired to double-check San Francisco Public Utilities Commission calculations regarding the increasing costs of the Hetch Hetchy Water System overhaul, Bay Area water officials said yesterday said.

"I do have some questions," said Art Jensen, general manager of the Bay Area Water Supply and Conservation Agency. "I'm going to have two outside experts review it." The agency represents 28 Bay Area governments and

water districts outside San Francisco, including San Mateo County. The 80-year-old system, which delivers water to about 2.5 million Bay Area residents from near Yosemite, is vulnerable to earthquakes and could leave the region without water for as long as 60 days if were to break, officials have said.

Jensen said that input from the auditors would help convince him that the methodology, factors and costs of the utility commission proposal are sound or that there are questions that need to be explored further.

The announcement that the Conservation

Agency will hire the two auditors comes the same day that the commission released the most detailed breakdown yet of the nearly \$1 billion in additional costs announced Feb. 8, raising the total cost from about \$3.6 billion to more than \$4.3 billion.

As reported in the Daily News Monday, Jensen, along with Conservation Agency board members, have continued to take the utilities commission — the agency heading up the Hetch Hetchy Water System rebuild — to task for its lack of clarity and openness regarding the cost and time it will take to complete the

project. The utilities commission took a major step in trying to assuage critics yesterday by voting to raise San Francisco water rates by 15 percent both in the current year and coming year to help pay of the bond debt for the rebuild.

"It's us honoring our commitment to step forward and issue the bonds for the rebuild," said Tony Winnicker, commission spokesman, describing the vote.

San Francisco residents, on average, will pay about \$1.10 more per month for water under the new rates, officials said.