

Electric power a big component of water delivery

By KQED

When you open that faucet, it's more than water that's flowing.

A few years back, number crunchers at the California Energy Commission tried to add up how much electrical power (and other forms of energy) goes into using water in California. The bottom line number they came up with: 19 percent. That is, nearly a fifth of all the power generated in California – as well as huge quantities of natural gas and diesel fuel consumed in the state – goes into water-related uses. You might call that report, entitled California's Water-Energy Relationship, as The Great Wake-Up Call. The idea that so much power could go into this one vital activity—moving and treating and using water—is both stunning and captivating. And it has spurred both state agencies and water and power utilities into action.

The California Public Utilities Commission, responsible for overseeing the activities of the state's big investor-owned electric utilities on one hand and numerous small water providers on the other, responded to the 19 percent number by authorizing a series of pilot projects to assess how to cut the amount of power used in connection with water. Since the CPUC is supposed to make sure that utility investments are cost-effective and don't burden ratepayers with excessive charges, the focus of most of the pilots was on areas where utilities could get the most bang for the buck. Mostly, that turns out to be water conservation.

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