

Solar desalination may be answer to water woes

By Peter Kelly-Detwiler, Forbes

Aaron Mandell, founder and chairman of WaterFX, looks at California's water issue like a classic entrepreneur. Where others see problems, he sees opportunity for improvement and profit. And that opportunity is huge.

It is common knowledge that access to clean water is a mounting problem across the globe. However, few places have water issues as complex and challenging as California, which has been dealing with the water issue for generations (some may remember the 1974 Jack Nicholson, Faye Dunaway film "Chinatown" that focused on the California water wars of the early 1900s). In California, the issue is highly complex, layered in a complicated history of rights, claimants, and the physical reality of too much demand for a limited supply. Water issues are also inextricably linked to energy issues: it takes an enormous amount of energy to pump, treat, and move water. So the water problem is not only limited to H₂O, it's a costly energy issue as well.

Mandell hopes to change that reality. He has a vision for how to make that happen, starting with a clean and modular technology and an open source approach that he hopes will stimulate a growing community of solutions providers. His company, WaterFX, has created a solar-powered desalination system to treat agricultural drainage that is not only benign from an energy standpoint, but also leaves the agricultural environment in better shape.

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