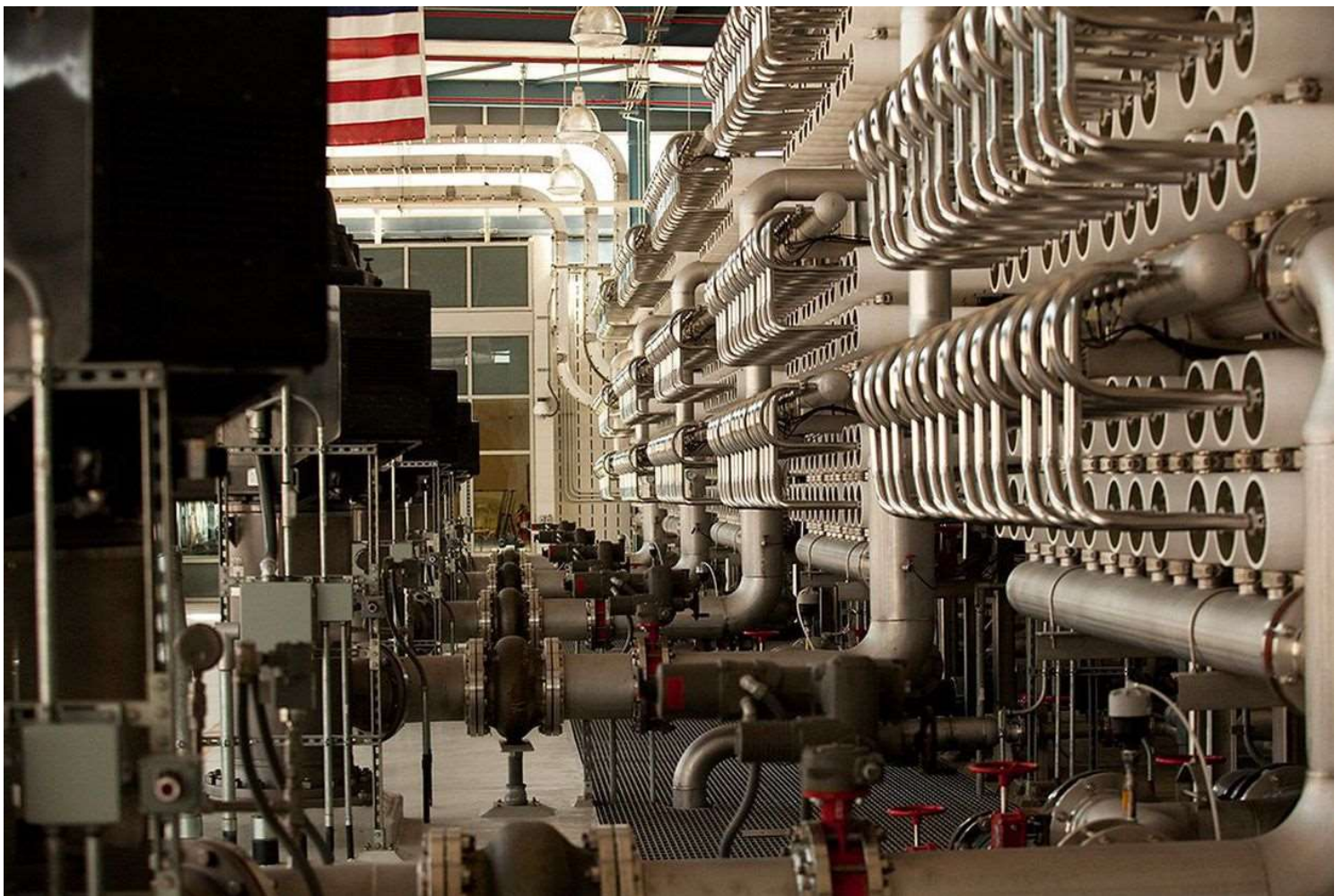





Seawater desalination plant proposed for Corpus Christi area

The proposed plant would be constructed in the city of Gregory and would be one of the first in Texas to use only seawater.

BY PAUL COBLER MAY 16, 2018 12 AM



Seen is the inside of the Kay Bailey Hutchison Desalination Plant on April 16, 2012. The \$87 million facility produces 27.5 million gallons of water per day, making it the largest inland desalination plant in the world. In Corpus Christi, a seawater desalination plant has been proposed, which would be one of the first in the state.  Ivan Pierre Aguirre

A seawater desalination plant is in the initial planning stages for construction in the Corpus Christi area, according to a public notice from the Texas Commission on

Environmental Quality posted May 7.

In Texas, desalination has often been earmarked as a source of water that can stand up to significant drought, and Texas Water Development Board records show 49 plants operating in the state that desalinate brackish water — water that has more salinity than freshwater but less than seawater. The Port of Corpus Christi's proposed plant, which it would construct on land the port owns in the city of Gregory, is unusual because currently no desalination plant in Texas solely processes seawater for industrial or municipal use.

"Desalination is really the only real drought-proof water supply that you can get," said Todd Votteler, president of Collaborative Water Resolution, which provides water expertise to Texas businesses. "For industrial users, that's really important because they're trying to ensure that their production process is not interrupted."

The proposed facility will output water treated for industrial use only, but will be located near the San Patricio Municipal Water District where the water can be further treated to become drinkable, said Sarah Garza, director of environmental planning and compliance for the Port of Corpus Christi.

The Texas Tribune thanks its sponsors. Become one.



Seawater is significantly more expensive to desalinate than brackish water, and the state's water plan only lists a few seawater desalination plants that are expected to be built in the next 50 years.

"Currently, [seawater desalination] is only practical when you're talking about industrial uses because industrial users of that water will pay a lot more for that water than agricultural or municipal users," Votteler said.

Predicted to output no more than 19.1 million gallons of water per day, according to the TCEQ notice, the plant would be one of the larger desalination facilities in the state. The largest is located in El Paso, where the Kay Bailey Hutchinson Desalination Plant outputs 27.5 million gallons per day.

The proposed Gregory seawater desalination plant is one of several competing to be the first in operation in Texas. Italian plastic manufacturing company M&G USA Corporation had been constructing a seawater desalination plant in Corpus Christi before filing for bankruptcy last year and selling off its assets. The Port of Corpus Christi bid for the project

on behalf of the city of Corpus Christi but was unsuccessful, and the site was sold to a different venture, leaving the project in flux.

Desalination will still be considered a major potential source of freshwater to meet Texas' growing needs, Votteler said, but he added that the high cost to desalinate seawater means the process will likely never be as big a supplier of water to Texas as brackish desalination.

"Today, we have so many more options than we used to have for water supply," Votteler said. "The biggest thing we need to do to meet Texas' water needs is find ways to take all these options, like desalination, and find new ways to make them work with the new technology we have available."