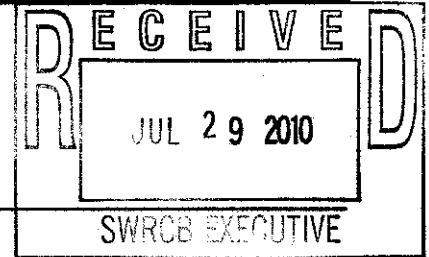


commentletters - comment letter - draft delta flow criteria report

From: Hugh Gurin <hugh@mortaragency.com>
To: <commentletters@waterboards.ca.gov>
Date: 7/29/2010 10:12 AM
Subject: comment letter - draft delta flow criteria report



Dear State Water Resources Control Board,

Please heed the warnings and advice contained in the report your staff recently completed on the Sacramento/San Joaquin Delta.

For decades, California's water barons - mainly corporate agriculture operators in the western San Joaquin Valley - have called the shots in the state capitol, and the water has flowed to them in lavish amounts.

Farmers from other regions, urban residents, California salmon and the people who depend on salmon for their livelihoods have all suffered from this grossly inequitable distribution. Most pointedly, the Sacramento/San Joaquin Delta - in conjunction with San Francisco Bay, the biggest and richest estuary on the west coast of the Americas - is teetering on collapse because of fresh water diversions to "Westside" agribusiness bigwigs.

For years, Big Ag has tried to obfuscate the issue with pie charts and graphs that "show" the Delta's collapse is pegged to invasive species, urban run-off, leaky sewage pipes - everything except water exports. The State Water Board's report rebuts this duplicitous drivel clearly and simply: Delta restoration will require 75 percent of the water that typically flows down the Sacramento River and San Joaquin River watersheds. This will mean reducing water exports by half.

Most "farms" of the western San Joaquin are massive agribusiness complexes that churn out megatons of federally-subsidized crops with subsidized water. Years ago, a friend of mine observed that "the welfare queens have nothing on the cotton kings" when it comes to swilling at the public trough. It was true then, and it's true now. Water use in the western San Joaquin Valley is extravagant - to a large degree, unregulated. Improving water use efficiency and employing better crop strategies would allow agribusiness to accommodate itself to the new and necessary reality.

On the other hand, there *are* family farms in the Delta - small holdings passed from generation to generation. They have been decimated by the relentless exporting of their water to the imperious barons of the Southland. And the same is true for our salmon fishermen. They have been ruined by years of fishing closures. And these closures, it must be noted, were driven by low salmon numbers caused by - you guessed it - water diversions. North Coast communities that were prosperous with family-wage fishing jobs a decade ago now struggle to hold on to even minimum-wage jobs - all so the water barons can continue to pump cash into their already engorged coffers.

Furthermore, let's scotch the Big Lie that Big Ag and their minions are spreading about the likely impacts of the Water Board report. They're already saying California cities will face apocalyptic water shortages if flows to the south state are reduced. Ridiculous. California's cities account for only 20 percent of the state's water use. Moreover, our cities have led the way in improving water use efficiency and developing sustainable sources for water, including wastewater recycling, desalinization plants - even cisterns. California's agribusiness colossus, on the other hand, accounts for 80 percent of state

water use and has done relatively little to improve use efficiency - that seems to be too much hard work for them. Instead, they choose to spend their energy and funds on relentless lobbying in Sacramento and Washington.

Where do we go from here? One thing we can do is return the Kern Water Bank to public ownership. This massive water bank was developed with public funds. But after an abstruse sweetheart deal, it ended up in the hands of Beverly Hills billionaire and Central Valley corporate farmer Stuart Resnick. With the Kern Water Bank reclaimed as a public asset, we could make a big step toward the fair and responsible management of state water.

We should also demand that the state's junior water rights holders - including giant Westside farming entities such as the Westlands Water District - take their rightful place in line for water. By legal precedent, they should be the first to endure cuts in water deliveries. Taxpayers subsidize water deliveries to Westlands. Meanwhile, their biggest crop - tomatoes - have created a glut on the market. Seventy-five percent of their second-biggest crop - almonds - is shipped overseas and the biggest chunk goes to China. There is no surplus of wild salmon. It is in high demand in domestic markets, selling for around \$20 a pound.

Adding injury to insult, the irrigation of Westland's selenium-rich lands has led to the contamination of state waterways. Selenium is a dire threat to wildlife and fisheries, and Westlands is the primary engine for its dissemination in Delta waters. It's bad enough that Westlands is making obscene profits at taxpayer expense - but it's an outrage that we're paying them to poison us.

Your recent report is a great start. You folks at the Water Board have done the right thing, and we thank you for it. Please heed your own warnings and do the right thing with California's water, for all of California's citizens.

Respectfully,

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