



Doolittle, restored river get star treatment at pump plant dedication

By Gus Thomson, Journal Staff Writer

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Gus Thomson /Auburn Journal A crowd of nearly 150 was on hand Thursday morning for the dedication of the Placer County Water Agency's American River pump station and river restoration project alongside the river. The river is free flowing after more than 30 years of being diverted into a now-closed tunnel.

U.S. Rep. John Doolittle was on the receiving end of a flood of praise Thursday for his efforts in securing funding to build the newly completed Placer County Water Agency pump station and river restoration project.

The \$75 million project, a 13-year effort led by the agency and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, provides a reliable, year-round water flow of up to 64.5 million gallons a day for western Placer County.

A river restoration component built into the project has opened a stretch of the river from the confluence to the upstream reaches of Folsom reservoir that has been closed to the general public since Auburn dam construction was taking place in the 1970s.

Robert Johnson, commissioner of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, was quick to express his office's pride in being part of the project and just as quick to praise Doolittle's efforts.

Dogged by an investigation into ties with lobbyist Jack Abramoff, the veteran Republican congressman from Roseville is stepping down this year after 16 years in the Capitol. He served on the Appropriations Committee and was able to press for \$45 million in federal funding since the mid-1990s to complete the project.

"Without your help, we wouldn't be here today," the bureau chief said, adding that Doolittle's role on the Appropriations Committee was "absolutely critical."



With the pump station building on a ridge in the background, audience members applaud during the facility's dedication at the American River near Auburn on Thursday



U.S. Rep. John Doolittle, R-Roseville, shakes hands with Placer County Water Agency Director Alex Ferreira, at right, after receiving an acrylic desk plaque Thursday in recognition of the congressman's long-term efforts to find support in Washington for the American River pump station project.

"This could not have happened without John Doolittle," echoed water agency Director Gray Allen. "He's been instrumental in making the American River pump station a reality."

Doolittle said during his own remarks that while he's leaving office, he's still an adamant supporter of building a multipurpose dam at the site of the pump station one day.

The latest round of debate over the dam will likely continue after he leaves office next year.

Most recently, the state Water Quality Control Board had made a move toward taking away Auburn dam water storage capabilities.

Doolittle urged a crowd of 150 sprinkled with local elected officials to aggressively fight to maintain water rights for an Auburn dam. He said that the dam will be built — after a catastrophic flood occurs in the Sacramento area.

"The time will come," Doolittle said. "And if we don't have the water rights, we're dead."

Doolittle also gave some begrudging acceptance to the river restoration.

Since 1972, when a tunnel at the dam site funneled the river downstream for two-thirds of a mile, boaters haven't been allowed on the stretch. That has changed with the restoration work and the site below the pump station also includes man-made rapids and a rock-and-concrete riverfront.



With a geometric background of earth, grass, rock and river as a backdrop, U.S. Rep. John Doolittle speaks Thursday at the dedication ceremony marking completion of the \$75 million American River pump station and river restoration project.

"I've been bigger on dams than river restoration but I have to admit this looks pretty good," Doolittle said.

Einar Maisch, water agency director of strategic affairs, put the work that started on the site in 2002 into perspective, noting that the area where the audience sat or stood was under 50 feet of rubble and rock.

The water agency sought the pump station to restore what it built in the 1960s at the site when the Middle Fork power and water project was built. Its original pump station was removed in 1972, with the promise that water

would flow from the Auburn dam reservoir when it was completed. But the dam has been stalled indefinitely since then, forcing the bureau to install and replace temporary pumps each summer as part of its agreement with the water agency.



Members of the crowd at Thursday's dedication of the American River pump station project watch as water flows are increased into a man-made section that includes underwater filters that collect water for the pumps

With replacement costs sometimes amounting to more than \$1 million a year, the bureau and the agency worked together to build a permanent pump station. In 1999, the state stepped in, threatening court action if river restoration wasn't included in planning for the project.

Loomis Mayor Russ Kelley, one of the audience members, said after the dedication that the reliability of water supply the new pumps offer will be much appreciated, particularly by agriculture in the area.

"Without agriculture, we wouldn't be where we are today," he said. "It's all about the water."

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Placer County Water Agency General Manager David Breninger joins a crowd at the shoreline Thursday to watch water pour over pump-station underwater intake filters after a dedication ceremony on the \$75 million project.



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