

Fish are Dying While Water is Held in Storage

Environmentalists, fishing groups, Indian Tribes and Public Trust advocates have severely criticized the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and the state Dept. of Water Resources for the mismanagement of Folsom, Oroville, Shasta and Trinity reservoirs during the drought.

The government agencies have drained the reservoirs to record low levels to divert water to corporate agribusiness, Southern California water agencies and oil companies conducting fracking and other extreme oil extraction operations.

That has produced low water flows and high temperatures in California rivers and streams — with devastating consequences for fisheries, especially in the Sacramento and Lower American Rivers.

For a time last fall, it appeared that Folsom Lake would drop below the water intakes that serve water districts in eastern Sacramento County and parts of Placer County.

That didn't have to happen.

The upper reaches of the American River are plugged with dams and reservoirs —

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Photo by Linda Thomas

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California has Grossly Overcommitted Rights to Central Valley Water

BY STEPHEN GREEN

For many decades, when a California water agency or a citizen wanted more water, they went to the State Water Resources Control Board and filed an application. After a review, the board would issue a water right allocation. Often, that meant another river would be dammed, a diversion facility would be built, or pumps or pipes would be installed to take the desired water.

As a result, people and organizations have rights to water in California rivers and streams that exceed the amount of water available in an average year. That is particularly true in the Central Valley where water rights are grossly oversubscribed.

Water rights claims in the Sacramento River Basin total 120.6 million acre feet per year. But the average unimpaired flow is only 21.6 million acre feet per year.

For the San Joaquin River Basin, claims total 32.6 million acre feet per

year and the average unimpaired flow is 6.1 million acre feet.

And for the American River Basin, claims total 3.3 million acre feet per year and the average unimpaired flow is 1.28 million acre feet.

Some of the water rights holders aren't even using their water allocation. They sell it to the highest bidder elsewhere in the state.

California's drought-stricken communities are suffering from a lack of water. In future years, population growth and climate change will exacerbate the problem. The well-being of California citizens and the foundation of the California economy are dependent upon bringing water demand into balance with supply.

The state Water Resources Control Board is the allocator of California's water resources. The board must act as a peoples' trustee in its water planning, water allocation and oversight

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Fish Dying

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all of which were built after the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation completed Folsom Dam in 1955. They are operated by the Sacramento Municipal Utilities District, Placer County Water Agency, El Dorado Power Authority, and Pacific Gas & Electric Co. And there is no operational coordination between the various agencies.

As a result, by the end of August in most years, the upper reservoirs are holding back more water than exists in Folsom Lake. That greatly reduces the water available to the Bureau of Reclamation to manage temperature and flows in the Lower American River.

State courts have ruled that State Fish & Game Code Section 5937 requires the release of sufficient water to meet the needs of fish and other aquatic life before any water is held or diverted for instream or out-of-stream purposes (*California Trout v. State Water Resources Control Board*).

It has been obvious for decades that all dam operations on the American River should be coordinated. Water managers could then work to assure that flow, temperature and timing of releases from Folsom Dam will provide the necessary instream conditions to support significant and sustainable natural production of Chinook Salmon and Steelhead Trout in the Lower American River. ■

Water Rights

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activities. The board has the authority to reconsider previous water allocations at any time. The board can revoke or alter a water right without compensating the holder of the water right.

Last March, Save the American River Association (SARA) petitioned the board to adjudicate water rights in the Central Valley. Successful adjudications have been completed in Colorado and Idaho. California is more than a century late in taking that action.

SARA's petition was ignored — as were petitions from several other organizations!

Gov. Jerry Brown appoints five people to the water board. His appointees are very aware that rights to water in the Sacramento and San Joaquin Basins were oversubscribed before the California Legislature passed the Water Commission Act of 1914, which established the water allocation permitting process.

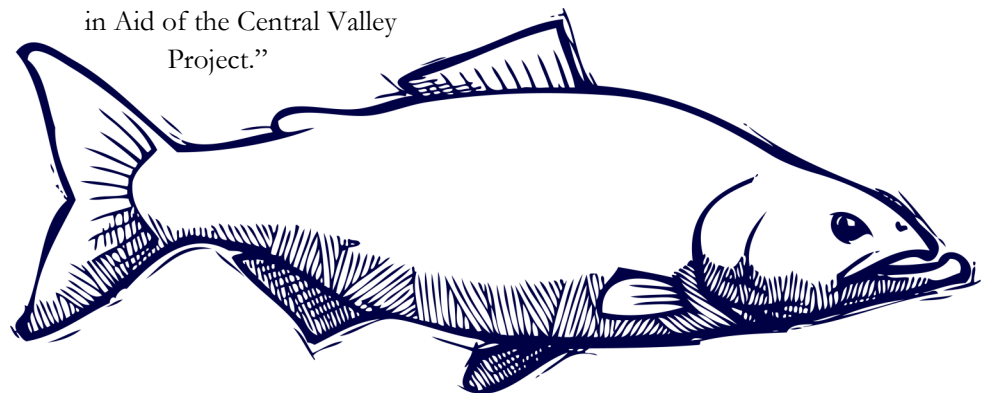
In 1942, Henry Holsinger, chief attorney, Division of Water Resources, issued a report titled: "Necessity For Comprehensive Adjudication of Water Rights on The Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers in Aid of the Central Valley Project."

The well-being of California citizens and the foundation of the California economy are dependent upon bringing water demand into balance with supply.

Nine years later, Holsinger appeared before a Congressional Committee chaired by then-U.S. Rep. Clair Engle where he again urged adjudication of water rights in the two major valley drainages. That should have occurred before construction of the state Water Project, he testified.

Engle's committee investigated the issues and concluded that rights to water in the Sacramento and San Joaquin River basins "are overcommitted and oversubscribed."

Sixth-five years later, Californians are still waiting for that adjudication to occur. Initiation of the adjudication process cannot be delayed any longer. ■



The Sites Reservoir Project Doesn't Add Up

BY STEPHEN GREEN

The Sites Project Authority, created by a group of water agencies, claims construction of the Sites Reservoir in Glenn and Colusa Counties would cost \$3 billion to \$4 billion. But the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation estimate is \$6.3 billion.

Proposals to build Sites Reservoir have been put forth since the 1940s and none have gotten past a drawing board. No study has ever shown that the project makes economic sense. Even Don Hodel, President Ronald Reagan's Interior Secretary, said the Sites Project will never pencil out.

Sites would add a little more than one percent to the state's reservoir storage capacity. And since it would be a pump-storage reservoir (with water diverted from the Sacramento River) there would be no water to pump into the reservoir during periods of extended drought. A model shows that it would be full in only one of five years.

The reservoir would claim some 18,000 acres in the Antelope Valley east of Maxwell and a dozen miles east of the Sacramento River. It would require 11 earthen, embankment dams. The tallest dam would be 300 feet. River water would flow to the valley through two existing canals and a new 13.5-mile pipeline. The tiny community of Sites would be flooded along with cattle ranches. Not all property owners want to sell.

Project backers are adamant that Sites water storage would help the state get through dry times. But there are better, cheaper alternatives for increasing California's water supply.

An economic analysis by EcoNorthwest concluded that retiring and curbing water rights for 300,000 acres of contaminated land being farmed in the San Joaquin Valley would cost upwards approximately of \$1 billion.

That is a reasonable price to pay to stop the poisoning of California's environment. In addition, retiring the land would free up to 455,000 acre-feet of water annually. That is a vast amount of water. The City of Los Angeles, in comparison, uses an average of 587,000 acre-feet per year.

Farmers whose lands are retired deserve compensation. And while \$1 billion is a substantial sum, it compares favorably when the cost of other water projects are considered. Sites would be six times more costly. The proposed Temperance Flat Dam on the San Joaquin River would cost an estimated \$2.5 billion.

Many growers are producing unsustainable crops on those contaminated desert lands. Their fields and orchards release drainage with selenium, salts and other wastes that impact wetlands, poison fish and wildlife and their habitats on both public and private lands. Drainage also has caused salinization of bottom-land soils and aquifers.

The disastrous consequences of industrial-scale cultivation of contaminated lands became obvious in 1983, when thousands of migratory waterfowl, including ducks and geese, were deformed or killed outright at Kesterson National Wildlife Refuge due to deliveries of toxic drain water from corporate farms.

That huge environmental scandal was exposed by Felix Smith, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist at the time, who now serves on the Board of the Save the American River Association.

Federal and state officials have been aware of the drainage problems for decades and have done little to prevent the continuing harm to the Public Trust resources. ■

Support County Parks — Buy An Annual Pass

The Pass pays for itself in 10 visits and all funds go directly towards maintaining and operating the 15,000-acre system. For as little as \$50 per year, you can have unlimited access and parking in the parks.

Pass holders receive free daily entry into Regional Parks and annual passes are valid for one year from date of purchase.

Pass Fees Are Based On Use:

Vehicle	\$50
Vehicle + Trailer or over-sized vehicle (over 22 feet):	\$100
Vehicle + Horse trailer	\$75
Vehicle and small watercraft:	\$80
Parks supporter pass*	\$50

** This pass is for those who want to support Parks but do not drive to Parks facilities*

Where to Purchase Your Parks Pass

- Online through the Sacramento County Web site www.regionalparks.saccounty.net
- At REI stores in Sacramento, Roseville and Folsom
- Patriot Cycles in Fair Oaks
- Effie Yeaw Nature Center at Ancil Hoffman Park
- Regional Park offices and park kiosks
- American River Parkway Foundation Office at the William B. Pond Recreation Area

Free Watercolor Workshops Offered on the Parkway

BY ANNETTE DEGLOW, COLLEGE GLEN NEIGHBORHOOD ASSN.

Have you ever wanted to try your hand at watercolor painting? Here's your chance. It's outdoors, on American River Parkway — and free! Professional Artist Woody Hansen and other supporters of the Parkway hold free mini-workshops at 9 a.m. Fridays (weather permitting).

Anyone open to learning and sharing the joy of out-door watercolor painting is welcome whether their level of experience is beginning, intermediate or advanced. Those under 18 should be accompanied by an adult.

The Free Friday Workshops have been offered by Woody weekly along the Parkway since August 2002, allowing participants to observe, sketch, photograph, or paint in a safe, supportive, group environment.

First-timers, beginners, and the budget conscious are advised to

attend one workshop prior to purchasing any painting equipment. Woody can help you make economical purchasing decisions should you want to continue with the workshops. If you already have equipment, just bring what you have on hand.

Enter at the Watt Avenue entrance to the Parkway where there is an entrance fee. Meet at the west end of the parking area, near the boat ramp.

In the event of a Free Friday cancellation, everyone is advised to check with Woody via e-mail by 6 p.m. Thursday to make sure the class is still on for Friday. Learn more at www.woodyhansen.com and click on Free Fridays.

Questions? E-mail Woody Hansen at watercolors@woodyhansen.com. ■

In Memoriam

Save the American River Association has received donations honoring the memory of the following friends:

Wanda Denson

Zeke Grader

Bill Griffith

Jack Sohl

Douglas R. Willis

Phyl & Fran Zeiner

Save the American River Association frequently receives donations in memory of lost loved ones, many of whom were users and supporters of the American River Parkway. Some donors give names. Others prefer to remain anonymous.

SARA notifies family members when donations are made and those people are always very appreciative. The money is used to further SARA's advocacy work on behalf of the Parkway. Contributions may be made by check, Visa or MasterCard. A form for contributions appears on the last page of this newsletter.

SARA also has a Legacy program. For information on the program, please call the SARA office (916) 482-2551. ■



Free Friday Watercolor Workshop on the American River Parkway

SARA Membership Donations *October — December 2015*

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 Russ & Cindy Warnock
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 Doris Brown & William Patterson
 Liz Williamson
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 Robert & Sandra Woodward
 Dr. Frances M. Wrightson
 Glenn Yee
 Dick Zeiner

SARA appreciates the support of our generous members. Without your support, SARA would not be able to continue our role as *Guardians of the American River and Parkway since 1961*. New and renewing members are listed in *Riverwatch* according to their preference (indicated on the SARA membership/renewal form).

Read Your *RiverWatch* Online

In an effort to reduce the amount of paper we use and to reduce our costs, SARA is now offering our members the option to read *RiverWatch* online.

RiverWatch is available in an electronic PDF format on our website. If you elect to receive your copy electronically, we will send you an e-mail each quarter with a link to the same articles on issues affecting our River and Parkway, so you'll never miss an issue.

Please take a moment to let us know if you'd like to read *RiverWatch* online. Visit the SARA Web site, sarariverwatch.org, and choose "Newsletter" and then "Delivery Preference" from the top menu. Complete the short form and, beginning with our next issue, we will e-mail you a link to *RiverWatch* and you will no longer receive a paper copy in the mail. Thank you for helping us become a greener organization! ■

*"Leave it as it is.
The ages have been at
work on it and man
can only mar it."*

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

The Effie Yeaw Nature Center Turns 40

In 2016, the Effie Yeaw Nature Center is celebrating the 40th year of its mission to bring "awareness of the beauty and diversity of the natural world to children, families and the community through education initiatives that foster appreciation, enjoyment and stewardship of the unique natural and cultural resources of the Sacramento Region."

The location on the American River Parkway in Ancil Hoffman Park also is a natural oasis for hiking, wildlife viewing or simply quiet reflection.

Effie Yeaw was a teacher, conservationist and environmental educator who began leading nature and cultural history walks in 1955 in what was then known as Deterding Woods.

Over time, the area was added to the county regional parks and the Effie Yeaw Nature Center opened in 1976. In 1981, the Nature Center began a cooperating association with the American River Natural History Association which adopted the same goals.

The partnership has been very beneficial to the community. As a recession deepened in 1910, Sacramento County quit funding the Nature Center. The American River Natural History Association took it over and has been steadily expanding the Nature Center's programs and involvement with school children.

Effie Yeaw died in 1970. But the American River Natural History Association continues the legacy she helped established.

The Nature Center's website can be found at: www.SacNatureCenter.net
Donations are welcome and tax-deductible. ■



Children enjoying a field trip at the Effie Yeaw Nature Center

Westlands New Front Group

For the Westlands Water District, five lobbying firms under contract in Sacramento and Washington, D.C., and a \$950,000 public relations budget aren't enough to lobby for more taxpayer-subsidized water and relaxing of laws and regulations that protect fish and wildlife.

Now Westlands has a new front group – one masquerading as a voice for Latino citizens who champion more water for Westlands' agribusiness giants. It is called El Agua Es Asunto de Todos (Water Is Everybody's Business). Westlands already has put \$1.1 million into El Agua promotions and pays most of its \$14,000-per-month operating expenses.

Working through campaign and media firms in New York and California, El Agua has saturated Spanish-language media in California with pleas for more water for these industrial irrigators claiming it will lift farm workers out of poverty. Facts do not fit the campaign slogans. As University of California researchers point out, agriculture employment growth has been increasing. *The industry gained a monthly average of more than 4,000 jobs in 2014, up one percent from 2013, according to the latest state Employment Development Department statistics.*

The Westlands' funded El Agua was part of the unsuccessful lobbying effort in Congress to weaken laws and regulations that protect fish and wildlife in Northern California waters that are exported San Joaquin Valley farms. The battle was renewed once Congress returned this year, and threatening consequences at the ballot box, El Agua has extolled the State Water Resources Control Board to ignore Public Trust needs and send more water to south of The Delta water export giants like Westlands.

Westlands Water District is the

nation's largest agricultural irrigation contractor and is mostly controlled by some of the state's richest and most politically savvy corporate farmers. The district serves more than 1,000 square miles of arid land in western Fresno and Kings Counties.

Reportedly, some 350 vertically integrated operations consume 1.5 times the volume of water needed to serve Los Angeles. As the subsidized water flow has been cut back during the drought, these irrigators have fallowed some fields and continued the massive overdraft of water from San Joaquin Valley aquifers leading to buckling canals, roadways and bridges. All to feed these permanent tree crops where once only cattle grazed before taxpayers subsidized water to the region.

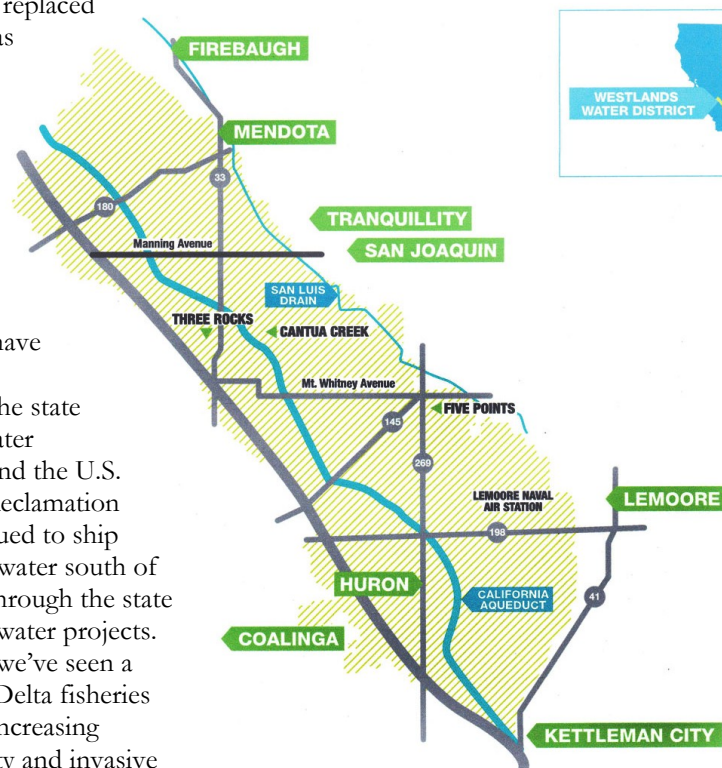
Since the drought hit California in 2012, Westlands farmers have added more than 18,000 acres of nut trees which need copious amounts of water. They replaced crops such as garlic and tomatoes that can be fallowed in periods of drought.

As drought conditions have worsened in California, the state Dept. of Water Resources and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation have continued to ship volumes of water south of The Delta through the state and federal water projects. As a result, we've seen a collapse of Delta fisheries along with increasing water toxicity and invasive species. On the upper Sacramento River, more than 95 percent of the

endangered juvenile winter-run Chinook salmon perished in lethally warm water conditions in 2014 and 2015 due to mismanagement by state and federal agencies. Conditions were only slightly better in the American River where there has been a steep decline in salmon and trout populations.

That has been caused "by the failure of the state and federal regulatory agencies to comply with the law," said Bill Jennings, executive director of the California Sportfishing Protection Alliance. There has been a "capture of the regulators by the regulated," he added.

Rep. George Miller, D-Martinez, was Westlands biggest foe in Congress until he retired last year. He was quoted in the New York Times as saying Westlands deserves "an A for effort" in the water wars. "These boys are committed. They play at the highest level, and they never sleep — ever." ■



Westlands Water District Service Area



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River and Parkway Since 1961*

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May we publish your name as a SARA member in a future *Riverwatch* issue?
(Contribution amount will **not** be included) ☐ Yes ☐ No

\$ _____ (Please indicate your TOTAL contribution) Check _____ VISA _____ MC _____

Insert credit card info below or go to our secure Web site to donate — www.sarariverwatch.org.

The following membership categories are suggested: (Please circle your choice)

\$10-\$24	Student	\$25-\$49	Regular
\$50 +	Supporting	\$100 +	Family
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