



### **Water Follies Continue**

It is hard to wrap our minds around the campaign to build two giant tunnels to divert Northern California around the San Francisco Bay Delta Estuary. The current battleground is the State Water Resources Control Board. They have begun a scheduled 55 days of hearings for just the first part of the proceeding.

Any logical person would first ask, what are the water quality standards for the Delta that would have to be met by such a massive diversion? The uncontested fact is that the standards have not been updated for over two decades, the time when those outdated standards have proven to be insufficient to protect fish species from imminent extinction.

Yet the powerful water special interests pushed the Brown administration to start the permit process for the tunnels before the standards are updated. They claim that even after they would spend at least \$16 billion to build the tunnels, they would agree to cut back their diversions if new protective standards reduce how much they could take.

It is not just environmentalists. Fishers, Delta agricultural and environmental justice groups are also up in arms. An unprecedented number of water districts in the Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys are calling foul as well. They realize that allowing the State to divert that much water into the tunnels would reduce the water supply available for them to meet the needs of their residents, businesses and farms.

Governor Brown is known for properly deriding those who deny climate change. Will it upset him to hear that his own staff are testifying at the hearings that they do not have to consider higher temperatures and more severe droughts when they are planning how to operate these huge diversions?

While all of this has a weird Alice in Wonderland feel, another major fatal flaw of the tunnels proposal remains unsolvable. Show me the money.

State law prohibits State taxpayers from paying any of the costs. Congress has no interest in sending billions to California (the Congressional rule is known as ABC – Anywhere But California).

That leaves water districts and their ratepayers to pick up the tab. Metropolitan Water District's General Manager is pushing his Board of Directors to commit to putting up about a quarter of the \$16 billion initial construction

cost. An important note: that estimate is based on only 10% of the design completed. Actual costs would undoubtedly be much greater – remember the Bay Bridge overruns?

But even just looking at the \$16 billion none of the other potential funding partners have committed. Santa Clara Valley Water District has begun to ask the hard questions including what better alternatives are available to meet their water supply needs.

However the real Achilles heels are the Westlands Water District and Kern County Water Agency. They would have to pay over half the cost. Just imagine going to their farmers and asking them to borrow around \$10 billion for a project that would take at least 20 years to come on line with no guarantee whatsoever they would get an additional drop of water even if it is built.

With all those problems and more, what's likely to happen? We believe that sometime in the next 12 months the tunnels proposal will collapse of its own weight. After the proponents complete their grieving process we will reach out to them again with ideas for a sustainable water, energy, climate change, and job creating program.

Stay tuned.



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