

# PRESS RELEASE: For Immediate Release

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### **Sacramento Valley Farms, Fish, and Faucets at Stake** Activists Sue State to Protect Family Farms, Groundwater, Streams, Rivers

**Chico, CA** – Butte Environmental Council (BEC), the California Sportfishing Protection Alliance (CSPA), and the California Water Impact Network (C-WIN) (the Coalition) filed a lawsuit on April 13, 2009 to protect the economy and environment of the northern Sacramento Valley. The California Department of Water Resources (DWR) and Governor Schwarzenegger have prepared to launch a water transfer program that will devastate the northern Sacramento Valley and continue the destruction of the Sacramento/San Joaquin Delta.

DWR is violating the law created to protect the public and the environment. The State's 2009 drought water bank was using the *Addendum to the Environmental Water Account Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report* (2004) as compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act until the Governor issued an exemption from CEQA. Under cover of the exemption, DWR and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Bureau) plan to take enough Sacramento Valley surface water for thousands of acres of agriculture in the arid San Joaquin Valley (600,000 acre-feet, which is the equivalent amount of water for over a million homes) and allow more than half of that to come from groundwater (340,000 acre-feet) to continue rice production here. These transfers would start the "conjunctive management" long sought by the water agencies, which will turn the northern Sacramento Valley groundwater basins into private water banks, which are not for the benefit of local farmers, fishermen, and residents, but for more water transfers into the most arid region of California.

Many growers south of the Delta, with very limited legal water rights, have imprudently planted orchard and vineyard crops hoping that more hydrologic manipulation will make them whole. "The state and federal water agencies have known for many years that the impacts from this project will sacrifice the economic, hydrologic, and biologic health of the last large, relatively intact watershed in California," stated Barbara Vlamis, the Executive Director of BEC. "Just look at the Owens River and Valley, the Colorado River, and the San Joaquin River and Valley to consider how badly the agencies have manipulated California's water for urban sprawl and desert agriculture," she continued.

To demonstrate what the water agencies have known for years, BEC raised many concerns in comments on the *Supplemental Environmental Water Account Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report* in 2007. For example:

1. *Groundwater Substitution (Upstream from the Delta) would result in a massive increase in the exploitation... of aquifer contents that will lead to increased impacts to the environment associated with dropping groundwater levels.*
2. *The legal ramifications of creating replenishment districts that own the contents of an aquifer system through groundwater banking are a disaster for existing groundwater dependent users who may lose their right to the resource.*
3. *A significant increase in pumping of the down-gradient portion of the area groundwater complex is likely to lead to an earlier (and more persistent) dewatering of these critical [salmon] rearing streams and may even result in the dewatering of larger streams that currently flow year-round and provide anadromous fish with natural spawning opportunities.*

The Coalition expanded on these issues in numerous meetings with DWR in 2008, in written communication, at public meetings, and in formal comments (attached). Despite the serious consequences from their water transfers, the water agencies are determined to move forward. "If only California's leadership could see that self sustainable watersheds are what will prevent the complete collapse of our fisheries, family farms, and drinking water," Vlamis concluded.

In addition to groundwater pumping in the Sacramento Valley, DWR and the Bureau want to merge their service areas so that each agency may serve the other's regular customers. DWR and the Bureau must obtain approval from the State Water Resources Control Board to do this, and the Governor has instructed the Board to expedite its process. Yet, "the whole premise of the Governor's drought emergency declaration is ridiculous," said C-WIN president Carolee Krieger. "Most reservoirs around the state have normal water levels this year. "

The Coalition seeks revocation of the drought emergency and full, public disclosure of the project, its impacts, and proposed mitigation measures in an Environmental Impact Report as required by state law. "The Central Valley Project (CVP) contractors north of the Delta and Friant Unit contractors in the San Joaquin Valley are receiving 100 percent of their water," emphasized Jennings. "The only people not receiving their full water allocations are Westlands and the Metropolitan Water District (MWD). And MWD is receiving a reduced amount of water because they gave up the urban preference in the Monterey Agreement."

The corporate agribusiness operations that are claiming water shortages are the most junior water rights holders in the western San Joaquin Valley. Many chose to convert from annual row crops to permanent crops, despite having among the least reliable water supplies in California agriculture and having created significant saline and selenium drainage problems. "Unfortunately, California has regulated its waters like the feds have regulated Wall Street and the result has been a collapse of fisheries and aquatic ecosystems," concluded Jennings.

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## **WATER FACTS**

- There is currently no real local protection for ground water in the northern Sacramento Valley and the "research" that has been proposed to establish a baseline for the aquifers is crude, not comprehensive, and not supported by independent scientists.
- Over one million people in the northern Sacramento Valley rely on the hydrologic integrity of the region for drinking water, economic productivity, and recreation.
- Los Angeles' Metropolitan Water District is seeking an additional 300,000 AF of water from the Sacramento Valley by 2010 and 550,000 AF by 2020.
- DWR and the Bureau are exploring selling ground water directly from the aquifer.

- In 1994, irrigation districts in Butte County sold 105,000 acre feet of surface water for the drought water bank and substituted groundwater to continue their operations. This caused significant impacts to adjacent agricultural wells and homes north of the pumping had their wells run dry, one Durham community well was forced to close, hoses ran between neighbors' houses for water emergencies, people unwittingly drank polluted water before the water ran out, and one family lost their farm from the impacts (<http://harpers.org/subjects/WadeGraham>).
- The San Joaquin River is already dewatered in its upper reaches from excess water consumption and a significant portion of the San Joaquin ground water basin has been collapsed (some areas over 30 feet!).