

Water Diversions Result in Delta Species Crash

by Jim Brobeck

Fed by the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers, the Bay-Delta is the largest estuary in the western United States. More than 60 percent of California's fresh water formerly flowed through the Delta. Massive federal and state pumps divert much of this water for export to the San Joaquin Valley agribusiness and to Southern California urban areas. In the past four years, four species of Delta fish have severely declined, along with the complex food web that sustains them. Threatened Delta smelt, small fish native only to the Delta, fell last fall to their lowest number ever.

Biologists are alarmed at what appears to be a collapse of the Delta ecosystem. There are three suspected causes of the Delta collapse, including degraded water quality, exotic species, and massive fresh water diversions. The collapse of the Delta ecosystem has in fact coincided with the highest annual rates of water diversions from the Bay-Delta. Increased pumping will make the ecosystem collapse even worse, and plans to increase pumping out of the Delta are in the works.

Central to the scheme is increasing the amount of water by incorporating groundwater into the state water system. The aquifer targeted for exploitation is the Lower Tuscan Formation. The lower Tuscan is located under Butte, Tehama and Glenn County. Chico's municipal water system draws from the Lower Tuscan. Our local creeks are directly connected to the same aquifer. The Natural Heritage Institute and the Dept. of Water Resources are unveiling a plan that would "utilize the Lower Tuscan Formation as a major new water supply...."

As the Integrated Regional Water Management Plan (IRWMP) takes shape, the objective will be to persuade as many entities as possible to become signatories and partners to the plan. But this will be a tough sell if the impacted communities are informed of the economic, social and environmental consequences. The Tuscan formation intersects the surface at the lower quarters of the foothills. A fully charged Tuscan aquifer helps to keep the creeks flowing and the riparian vegetation vibrant. Butte Creek, Big and Little Chico Creek, Mud Creek, Rock Creek, Deer Creek and Mill Creek are all part of the system. There is a distinct probability that increased groundwater extractions from the Lower Tuscan Formation could increase stream seepage into the drained aquifer. The plan practically promises to decrease or even de-water local stream flows when the Tuscan is being exploited during the summer and fall.

As the increased Delta water exports create ecological collapse in the lower Sacramento-Feather River, the increased drafting of water out of the Lower Tuscan Aquifer threatens

to dry out our local creeks. Clearly we need to devise other strategies to deal with California's demand for water.

Please write a letter TODAY to Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. Urge him to stop the Delta pumping plan. Be sure to mention the following points in your letter: It makes no sense that the State is planning to increase pumping when the Delta is so stressed and so many species are in serious decline. We have faster, better, cheaper ways to provide water for California's future. These are outlined clearly in the just released California Water Plan. Investments in water use efficiency and recycling will make available four times more water than the Delta pumping plan will provide. Tell the Governor that California needs a sensible and sustainable water policy that conserves the Delta and our rivers, and keeps our state beautiful, vibrant, and strong.

Please mail your letter TODAY to:

The Honorable Arnold Schwarzenegger
Governor, State of California
State Capitol, Sacramento, CA 95814
Email: www.govmail.ca.gov

For more information:

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