

**BAY AREA WATER SUPPLY AND CONSERVATION AGENCY
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING**

March 15, 2013

Reports and media coverage of interest between March 3, 2013 and March 12, 2013.

Reports

(Under separate cover)

Publication: Commitment – Annual Report for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2012
Author: San Francisco Public Utilities Commission

This report is also available online at the following address:
<http://www.sfwater.org/modules/showdocument.aspx?documentid=3115>

Media Coverage

Date: March 12, 2013
Publication: Millbrae Patch
Article: Council Vote Will Protect Water, Maintain Hetch Hetchy Reservoir

Date: March 11, 2013
Publication: ABC News
Article: Water wars resume with Delta tunnels, bond revamp

Date: March 9, 2013
Publication: Merced Sun-Star
Article: Showdown Over Salmon: River plan would require more water for the fish

Date: March 3, 2012
Publication: A last look at California's glaciers
Article: San Francisco Chronicle – Opinion
Author: Tim Palmer

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Council Vote Will Protect Water, Maintain Hetch Hetchy Reservoir Millbrae Patch - March 12, 2013

Agenda item is response to environmentalists' desire to dismantle O'Shaughnessy Dam and restore Hetch Hetchy Valley.

A measure on the ballot in San Francisco last year has spurred 26 agencies that buy water from San Francisco to pass a resolution designed to keep Hetch Hetchy as their primary water supply for the foreseeable future.

If it had passed, Measure F on the November 2012 ballot in San Francisco would have required the City and County of San Francisco to begin a two step process to evaluate how to drain Hetch Hetchy Reservoir and how to replace the water it supplies to 2.6 million users in four Bay Area Counties.

The 26 agencies, known collectively as the Wholesale Customers, that get water from Hetch Hetchy are located in Santa Clara, Alameda and San Mateo Counties. Hetch Hetchy also supplies water to residents of the City and County of San Francisco which owns the dam and the water rights.

The 26 Wholesale Customers buy two-thirds of the water that comes from Hetch Hetchy and are responsible for two-thirds of the cost of maintaining the system.

The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission already passed a similar resolution in January and is encouraging the Millbrae City Council, along with the other Wholesale Customers, to pass the resolution.

The resolution requires a formal amendment to a 25-year agreement signed by all parties in 2009. The amendment will forbid San Francisco from draining Hetch Hetchy Reservoir.

Cities in California like to know where their water is coming from in order to attract new businesses. Business customers are the biggest users of water and are often pay the highest taxes so a secure water supply is important to economic development throughout the state.

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If there's something in this article you think should be corrected, or if something else is amiss, email the editor at millbrae@patch.com.

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Water wars resume with Delta tunnels, bond revamp

March 11, 2013

ABC News

2013 may not be a year of major changes in California's long running saga over its water supply, but it is poised to be a year where some big decisions are made.

"You can just feel it coming," says Phil Isenberg, chair of the Delta Stewardship Council and a veteran of the last three decades in the state's water wars.

In part, that sense of a rising tide in the water battle may stem from two major issues both making their way to the stage: details on [Gov. Jerry Brown's call for twin tunnels that would dig under the periphery of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta](#), and the deadline-driven push at the Capitol to downsize [an \\$11.1 billion bond measure](#) before it appears on next November's statewide ballot.

Though it's the one with the longer timeline, the governor's tunnels proposal will get the first return to the spotlight. State water officials are expected to unveil new details by week's end on the [Bay Delta Conservation Plan](#), which includes the proposed 35-mile Sacramento County to Contra Costa County infrastructure mega-project.

The project's cost estimates began at \$13 billion and [seem to be going upward from there](#), and would require a careful partnership of federal, state, regional, and local officials. Since Brown rolled out the general overview -- [with his own colorful take on things](#) -- last July, it's been the focus of intense criticism and even a feature length anti-tunnels documentary.

It also, until now, may have overshadowed other more immediate water issues.

"Even if the tunnels are approved, which I think is going to be a great fight," says state Sen. Lois Wolk, D-Davis, "we have tremendous needs in the Delta, we have tremendous needs statewide."

Which is where legislative efforts come in to revamp, and shrink, the water bond crafted back in 2009 but delayed three full election cycles -- from 2010 to 2012 and now to November 2014. The reason for the delay was pretty simple: there were fears the voters would see the bond as too big and reject it. Now, legislators say it's important to go back and take another look at the bond's priorities -- which currently range from surface storage to drought relief.

"Times have changed," said Wolk after [a recent Senate hearing on the subject](#), "and it's time to take a look at what the bond should be used for."

One bright spot from that hearing: there's already approved, but unspent, bond authority that could -- alone -- downsize the bond by some \$4 billion. The nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office told legislators that available cash would come in equal parts from two 2006 measures, [Proposition 84](#) and [Proposition 1E](#).

Cracking open the 2009 water bond won't be so easy, as it took former Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger months to navigate the murky rivers of interest group politics last time. The bond also became criticized for pork-barrel deal making, growing in size after [an initial proposal in the summer of 2008](#).

The final deal, though, did offer something everyone seemed to support: help for the Delta, where diversions of water have made big changes over the decades in the ecosystem of the freshwater estuary. The 2009 agreement made Delta protection and water supply "co-equal" goals.

"That was a gutsy decision," says the Delta Stewardship Council's Isenberg. "But making that work, in practice, is a lot harder than most people would think."

Showdown Over Salmon: River plan would require more water for the fish

By JOSHUA EMERSON SMITH

Merced Sun-Star

Saturday, Mar. 09, 2013

MARCI STENBERG/mstenberg@mercedsunstar.com Merced Irrigation District spillway gate at the main reservoir, Lake McClure a half mile or more away from the dam on the northwest end of the lake.

SACRAMENTO While environmentalists say newly proposed regulations for the San Joaquin River and its major salmon-bearing tributaries don't go far enough, irrigation officials decry predicted negative economic impacts.

The Bay-Delta Water Quality Control Plan in its draft form would require the irrigation districts to leave significantly more springtime runoff in the Merced, Tuolumne and Stanislaus rivers.

Specifically, the proposed regulations would restrict the Merced, Turlock and Modesto irrigation districts from using more than 65 percent of mountain runoff between February and June.

As a result, the region likely would have to endure more than \$60 million in annual economic losses, according to data from the state Water Resources Control Board.

More than 400 jobs in the region could be permanently lost, with about 66,000 acres of farmland taken out of production, according to the water board.

"It's a significant impact to the region, not only from an agricultural prospective, but you'll have a significant amount of job loss," said Allen Short, executive director of the San Joaquin Tributary Authority.

The plan is to keep the level of the San Joaquin River and the tributaries at roughly 35 percent of the unimpaired flow -- a term describing what runoff levels would be without water diversions for drinking and irrigation.

Public input sought

The public comment period for the draft plan ends March 29. The revised draft plan will be released to the public in the summer and will go before the board in the fall.

In recent years, the river has dipped down to as low as 5 percent of unimpaired flows, according to water board officials.

While some environmentalists have said the plan would improve conditions, others argue the requirements don't go nearly far enough.

"I think the science is clear," said Doug Obegi, an attorney with the Natural Resources Defense Council specializing in water issues. "About half of all runoff needs to stay in the San Joaquin tributaries in order to restore and sustain healthy fish populations."

In a 2009 study, the state water board found that if only 40 percent of the water in the tributaries were diverted, salmon populations on the San Joaquin River would likely increase significantly.

However, that study didn't take into account economic impacts, said Les Grober, assistant deputy director of water rights with the state water board.

"The board is very mindful of competing needs and not just proposing a one-sided solution," he said.

"The proposed flow objectives may not provide the precise or optimum flows for fish, but they will provide better conditions than now occur," he added.

Flexibility built in to plan

At the same time, that 35 percent flow requirement would not be a fixed number, he said. Under the water board's plan, groups could petition the board yearly to adjust the requirement between 25 percent and 45 percent of unimpaired flow.

"That is a big difference," Grober said. "In the past we have required one number, and that locks us into something that is not always optimal. This allows us to more nimbly respond to changing conditions."

Results aren't certain

However, it's far from clear just how beneficial this will be for fish populations.

There's a "reasonable expectation" the plan will improve the salmon population, but it will take time to know for sure, said Jay Lund, director of the center for watershed sciences at the University of California at Davis.

"It's a little bit like asking a farmer 'Will almond prices be high for the next five years?' " he said. "We're in a similar kind of game, trying to manage the fish. We don't know if these bets will pay off, but some folks feel they're worthwhile."

For the valley irrigation districts, the chance salmon population might improve is not worth the cost.

"We're talking about hundreds of jobs, tens of millions of dollars to the local economy. A third of this economy is ag-oriented in this area," said Merced Irrigation District General Manager John Sweigard.

Under the 35 percent unimpaired flow requirements, the district said, it would have had to release an additional 53,000 acre-feet of water between February and June 2012, a roughly 60 percent increase.

The result of which would have been an even stricter cap on water deliveries during this year's critically dry season, according to district officials.

Growers would be facing a 1.6 acre-foot per-acre cap on water deliveries, compared with the recently approved 2.4 acre-foot per acre curtailment, Sweigard said. An acre-foot covers one acre 1-foot deep.

"We think they're underestimating what the impacts are going to be," he said. "We think their analysis is bad."

All the state can do is balance the needs of the different stakeholders, Grober said. But there's going to be a trade-off between the economy and the environment.

"The intent of this proposal is to achieve the goal of fishery protection, but we must also consider the competing uses of water because proposals such as this will have a water supply cost," he said.

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Note: The glacier on Mt. Lyell is the one that feeds the Tuolumne River.

A last look at California's glaciers

Tim Palmer

Published 6:26 pm, Sunday, March 3, 2013

Beyond the world we know, in the shaded recesses of our highest mountains, lies another California. It's a world of rock and ice, of brilliant light, of fearsome snowstorms that over time have formed a stunning collection of magnificent glaciers.

Many people don't realize that glaciers even exist in California. In fact, we have about 130.

Most cling to steep slopes of the [Sierra Nevada](#), but they're disappearing at a rapid rate. Geologist [Greg Stock](#) of Yosemite National Park reports that even Lyell Glacier - second-largest in the Sierra - no longer has the mass required for it to creep downhill, which is one condition that defines a glacier.

With a strange but passionate marriage of gusto and sadness, I recently spent a full spring, summer and fall photographing these glaciers. It was one of the most remarkable years of my life. Climbing to mountain heights brought astonishing scenes as the sun edged over the horizon and bathed the ice in morning's golden glow. At campsites I was enchanted by glacier-fed streams that nourished rivers below, including the Tuolumne, later tapped by San Francisco through the Hetch Hetchy system, and the Owens, bound for Los Angeles. The glacial runoff continued long after other waterways had withered in summer's drought.

It was a privilege to see such beauty. It was tragic to know I would not see it again.

Among all the changes wrought by global warming - heat waves, raging floods, rising seas, menacing droughts - the melting of the glaciers is the most immediately visible for anyone who ventures high enough to see them.

One might reason that California's glaciers are already small and of little consequence, but the same forces that are melting them are also reducing the mountains' entire snowpack, which will diminish this century by 30 to 70 percent, according to scientists at [Scripps Institution of Oceanography](#). That snowpack accounts for 60 percent of the water used in California.

How does one respond to such fatal news? New dams are not the answer because we've already built on all the dam sites that made economic and engineering sense, and further ponding of water increases evaporative loss.

Rather, water delivery systems need to be made more efficient to cope with shortages and to leave adequate nourishment in rivers for the greater community of life, including commercial fisheries at sea. Floodplains need to be safeguarded as open space to accommodate higher floods and to recharge groundwater. Certainly we need to reduce the source of the problem - burning fossil fuel - and the state Legislature has taken steps to bring our discharge of global-warming gases down to 1990 levels. But even if those contested efforts succeed, they're not enough.

Reductions at the essential scale can hardly be imagined as long as our population is slated to double within a half-century or less. If we can't do the job now, how will we do it then? Our commitment to endless growth needs to be challenged, or the problems stemming from unlimited needs will be unlimited as well.

Take one last, sweet look at these glacial gems of California. It's too late to stop their melting. But perhaps their loss can help inspire us to turn the tide of destructive change and protect the workings of the natural world upon which we all depend.

[Tim Palmer](#)'s most recent books include his photo collection, "California Glaciers" (Heyday, 2012), and "Field Guide to California Rivers" (University of [California Press](#), 2012).

Read more: <http://www.sfgate.com/opinion/openforum/article/A-last-look-at-California-s-glaciers-4325041.php#ixzz2NWvJuw3Q>