BUREAU OF RECLAMATION

WATER EDUCATION FOUNDATION

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BAY DELTA CONSERVATION PLAN MEETINGS

PUBLIC COMMENTS ONLY

FOR:

FRESNO
Fresno:

Chair: Would you like to just try to do the summary points and make those? Okay, but you want to go second? Okay. So Mike Henry, if you can come up please.

Mr. Henry: Mike Henry with the California Farm Water Coalition based in Sacramento. Our membership is devoted entirely to farm water, so that’s what I’m going to speak about today. The water that flows through the Delta is the focus of our attention and we believe it’s very important to keep that water flowing. It doesn’t matter where anybody lives in the state or where their place of business is, they’re impacted by the water that flows from the Delta, even if they’re in Northern California. Because the water that flows from the Delta helps to underpin the economy of California, and we all benefit from that. When we lose that supply of water that goes out, then our economy suffers. So it’s important that we look through the BDCP process that to work the water that’s going to flow, to be able to allow it to flow and to continue to flow. We don’t need to be divisive in making decisions on this. We don’t need to create winners and losers. We see that happening even right now with the court decision from last year. That court decision created winners
and losers. As a result of that action, as of May 1, we’re looking at about 800,000 acre feet of water that has not flowed to users that have contracted for that water. Instead that water is going on out through the Bay, to the Pacific Ocean. That’s just up to this point. How much more water are we going to lose? We’re fearful of that. Already five million people have had their water supply cut. This is not voluntary restrictions, but they’ve experienced losses, both domestic and on farm, and on farm is my focus. We’ve seen hundreds of jobs on the farms have already been lost, hundreds of thousands of acres have not been planted, and these job losses are year-round employment. They don’t involve the harvest season where we (indiscernible) more workers. When that arrives job losses are going to be even more staggering. We recognize the importance of the Delta and maintaining that environment. We equally recognize the importance of keeping the water flowing through the Delta to those who have contracted for that. When we stop that water flowing, then we start to see winners and losers. We believe that agriculture creates a very important part of our economy. The ripple affect to the transportation, processing, retail industry, people are losing their jobs. More importantly, families are
losing opportunities to live in a lot of these rural communities because of the economic impacts that they’ve encountered. The current system of moving water through the Delta isn’t working. It’s resulted in environmental losses, and it’s also resulted in interruptible supplies. What the BDCP we encourage that process to resolve that. It’s no surprise that we would encourage the BDCP to keep the water flowing, recognizing the value of the role that our farmers play. We also recognize that the Bay Delta environment must be protected. But don’t sacrifice one over the other. Not bad, huh?

Chair: Come around this way, and then –

Male: I think it’s important – I’m a rancher, okay, and I’ve been doing it for 40 years, and we grow pistachios.

Chair: (indiscernible)

Male: Okay. And I started in the business in 1968. I think there were 200 acres of pistachios planted in the State of California at that time. Today there’s 150,000 acres of pistachios. And we are about to overtake Iran as the leading producer of pistachios in the world. They’re falling behind because they have a water problem, which is rather ironic. They’ve been taking their water from the aquifer.
They have no canals from the mountains to help them out. And so
the salt is continuing to rise as the aquifer falls, and the quality of
their product is dropping drastically. We have captured the EU
market, the European Union market, in the last two years because of
Iran’s water shortage, by sending top quality product over there.
And that’s the only way we can maintain our product throughout the
world, is to provide our people with top quality product. We’re very
proud of what we’ve done., and I speak for the whole industry. And
it’s been a marvelous journey. Now as far as my ranch is concerned,
it’s just about 2,000 acres. I’m the manager and administrator. I’m
a part owner. And there are six partnerships involved. And we’re
located right below Kettleman City on I-5. We are bracketed by the
California Aqueduct on one border and I-5 on the other border. We
watch that water go by every day. And I want to speak particularly
to half of the ranch. It’s in two parts. We originally bought 933
acres back in 1980, and that’s the one I want to talk about. It’s
totally dependent upon the State Water Project. We have no other
source of water. We could’ve banked some water, but in the last
three or four years we haven’t been able to bank any water because
the shortage has caught up with us year after year. And we can’t put
a well down because it’s too salty. So we must depend on the SWP for our water. Now the cost of water, as everything else, is going out of sight. And I’ll just give you what it costs us. In 2006, our cost of water was $68.50 an acre foot. For this ranch, $215,000. Okay. In 2007, with a 60% allocation, last year, the cost for our water was $156.45. That was more than double the year before, for a total of $492,000. This year we estimate that, if we can find some more water, it will cost us almost $1 million, and that’s going to be close to $300 an acre foot. We haven’t got that water yet, and every day that goes by the water keeps going up in price. But at any rate, we have to get this water sometime between now and June because we only have 200 acre feet of water to take care of 900 acres, and that just doesn’t work. We can probably keep the trees alive, but I hate to think of what the crop’s going to look like. So we’re in desperate straights right now. By the way, that crop is probably worth, in the marketplace, grower prices, okay, if you will, about $5 million. And that’s about 2.5 million pounds. And the price is up this year because of the worldwide increase in food. So that’s about $2 per pound to us, which is worth $5 million. So the best scenario is that our cost of water is going to go up again this year at a cost close to
$1 million, that’s the best scenario. The worst scenario is that we lose $5 million. And if this happens again next year we’re going to be out of business. So I want to – I’ve been researching this thing ever since the Wanger decision back in August. And I’ve been talking to people that work for the University of California, Davis. There have been over 100 essays done on the Delta smelt. And the most prominent one done took five years, and it was done by William Bennett, not the guy in Washington, D.C., that writes all those books. But he’s an ecologist, and he spent five years on this report. And I want to quote you some things from his report, because this did not appear in the Wanger decision at all.

Chair: (indiscernible) comments, your written comments (indiscernible)

Male: Well this is the gist of my whole reason for being here, is to read this to you. It’s too short pages, okay.

Chair: I understand, but we’ve been trying to stay consistent between all of our meetings, and we’ve asked everyone to stick to three minutes.

Male: Well there’s nobody else in back of me. There’s not 200 people here or anything.

Chair: (indiscernible)
Male: Okay, I appreciate it very much, okay. The taxpayers of California have spent over the years billions of dollars for a statewide water system, second to none in the world, I might add, that services 25 million of its citizens and millions of acres of rich farmland. More than any other occurrence, this water project has unified the citizens of the State of California. Talk of dividing the state into two entities, north and south, is no longer taken seriously. How is it then that what has been accomplished here is now being curtailed in order to save a little three-inch fish? The ensuing damage to the economy, the environment, and the lives of citizens throughout the state is going to be tragic. No one is arguing with the plight of the Delta smelt, which is native to the Delta estuary. But its demise cannot be laid solely at the feet of the pumps, which take water from the Delta and deposit in the California Aqueduct. A myriad of scientific reports reveal that 185 non-native species now occupy the Delta, several prey upon the Delta smelt itself, and also vie for zoo plankton, it’s main source of food. The most destructive predator is the inland silver side – and by the way, I’ve never that in print anywhere, in any magazine or newspaper article, but this comes from a peer-reviewed report – which entered the estuary in 1975 and
is now found in prolific numbers throughout the Delta. It is slightly larger than the Delta smelt, and is also a plankton eater. Under laboratory conditions, these two species of tiny fish were placed together in the same tank for 60 days. The inland silver side thrived, while 30% of the Delta smelt died, and the remaining appeared to be in starvation mode. The foregoing lab experiment and the three following quotes were taken from the most comprehensive report ever compiled on this little fish. It’s called The Critical Assessment of the Delta Smelt by William Bennett. It is peer reviewed. And in talking with Mr. Bennett, he told me it took him five years to do this study. There are 125 references to other, some peer reviewed, some not peer reviewed, but scientific reports. Now his quotes – and I want you to really think about this because when Judge Wanger handed down his decision he was making some rather broad assumptions here. The quote, for Delta smelt – and this is from the scientific report – from the Delta smelt it has never been established that reducing water exports at the critical times has any benefits for the population. Second quote, it is currently unclear if losses to the water projects are a major impact on their abundance. And three, numerous data gaps will need to be filled before we can understand
the impacts of water export operations on the Delta smelt population. By ignoring these truths, a federal judge ordered the pumping of water to be sharply curtailed to millions of our citizens. This order took effect in December of ’07, and is in force through June 20th of this year. I’ll skip over this part. At risk is drinking water to 25 million people and the bread basket of the world, over 9 million acres of rich farmland, comprising 350 different species of productive plants. The latter, by the way, is nature’s greatest gift to clean air – the Clean Air Act, I love it – and the prevention of global warming through the process of photosynthesis, the conversion dioxide to oxygen. There are 28 varieties of trees and vines in that 350 species, and three of them, almonds, walnuts, and pistachios, cover a million acres and comprise 120 million trees. Now that’s only on one million acres. The other permanent crops comprise another two million acres. So you’re talking about close to 400 million plants, versus that little fish. Now that to me is a little out of proportion. In the first three months of this curtailment, 600,000 acre feet of water have already been diverted to the Pacific Ocean, and now it stands at 800,000. That amount of water would meet all the water requirements for the City of San Jose, with a population of
954,000 people for five years. The hardest hit, however, are those who farm millions of acres in our central valleys. Thousands of acres of row crop land will go fallow this year or nonproductive, and believe me, people are going to pay with their lives for this, because if you recall, there was a horrible accident last year, it was a 151 car pile up in the valley. It was caused by a dust storm. And if you’ve ever driven into a dust storm, you can’t see your hand in front of your face. It appears just immediately, and it’s gone just about as fast.

Chair: (indiscernible) are you just about through?

Male: Yeah, just about through. So also there are wells that are being drilled. It’s a waiting list to get a well down there. One of my neighbors is putting down four wells. He’s got 6,000 acres of pistachios, and the water will be somewhat salty. And also water transfers are taking place all over the place with the Metropolitan Water District being the biggest buyer. This state is being subjected to a giant experiment that flies in the face of peer-reviewed, scientific evidence to the contrary. Likewise, the repercussions to the nation will be huge. On only 4.4% of all the land under cultivation in America, this state provides 50% of the nation’s fruits,
nuts, and vegetables. Deny them their water needs, and we all suffer
the consequences. One final note to our government leaders and
environmental community. Our government is designed to be a
republic, where the rights of the individual are sovereign and always
protected. The remedies being executed under the Endangered
Species Act, in an attempt to save the Delta smelt, are placing
millions of people and hundreds of plant species in extreme danger.
The utter disregard for their safety is beyond comprehension. The
ESA must not be loosely interpreted, but man must never be
subservient to lesser creatures, and 350 plant species must never be
put at risk for one, or even a few, other species. The laws of nature
will endure. The Delta smelt is a victim of the survival of the fittest,
which is just one of nature’s inconvenient rules. Thank you.

Chair: Thank you. Anyone else? Thank you all very much for coming.

And remember that deadline (indiscernible) other comments you’d
like to send in, that would be great. Thank you all for coming.

-- MEETING ADJOURNED --