



California Sportfishing
Protection Alliance

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Conservation Groups Question Wisdom of Planned State Water Project Amendments

Two conservation organizations, the California Water Impact Network (C-WIN) and the California Sportfishing Protection Alliance (CSPA), registered strenuous objections Monday to a proposal from the Department of Water Resources (DWR) that would fundamentally change the way the State Water Project (SWP) operates.

The SWP, a massive series of dams and conveyance facilities financed by a \$1.75 billion bond approved by California voters in 1960, delivers on average approximately two million acre-feet of water per year from its reservoir at Oroville to contractors in the San Joaquin Valley and Southern California. For years, critics have pointed out that the SWP contracts promise to deliver twice as much water as the system can actually deliver in an average year. In addition, there is strong evidence that project operations are a major contributing cause of the collapsing fishery in the Delta.

A thirty-six page letter filed by C-WIN and CSPA lays out a litany of problems with the proposal and highlights huge gaps in DWR's environmental review of the planned changes. "These changes would eliminate critical provisions in the SWP contracts designed to protect urban areas in times of shortage and the environment against unsustainable export pumping out of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta," says Lisa Coffman, Executive Director of C-WIN. "DWR's proposal changes the way water is allocated in the SWP system in a way that encourages excessive pumping from the Delta at critical times of the year for the delta Smelt and other imperiled fish species," she added.

DWR's own environmental review of the proposal reveals that the project will contribute to the Delta's crisis, but indicates that these impacts can be mitigated by a set of ongoing and planned programs. "The problem," Coffman interjects, "is that the programs already in place are showing no signs of solving the crisis in the Delta and DWR provides

no assurances that programs planned for the future will fare any better. This is just another case of pump now, fix later. Unfortunately, such an approach could spell disaster for the ecosystem, which is running out of time.”

DWR is also proposing to finalize a transfer of the Kern Water Bank (KWB), the largest groundwater bank in the world, to a joint powers authority controlled by private interests. “The KWB could have been developed into a state-owned drought water bank. Instead, just as California needs such a resource to protect established uses and the public trust, DWR proposes giving it away,” indicates Coffman.

These proposals were first conceived over a decade ago, in 1995, as part of an effort to settle disputes between urban and agricultural contractors. “What might have seemed like a good deal for the people of California then, is now desperately out of sync with reality,” states Coffman.

C-WIN and CSPA’s letter urges DWR to take a hard look at the costs and benefits of this project for the people of California and the State’s public trust resources. The full text of the letter can be downloaded at: <http://www.c-win.org/TopStory.html>.

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