

Delta scofflaws

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Severe drought conditions have inflicted harsh realities throughout California. Well, almost everywhere. While community wells run dry, farm fields turn to dust and key reservoirs are at near all-time lows, Delta farmers are stealing millions of gallons of water set aside for fish, wildlife and the environment, as well as other water users. And, yes, these are the same Delta farmers who are funding the No on Proposition 1 campaign, opposing a water bond measure that seeks to fund critical needs across the state.

According to state and federal water officials, Delta farmers are ignoring reality and are taking more water than they are entitled to use, even as the state is mired in the third consecutive year of a historic drought and other farmers, farm workers and fish and wildlife suffer.



A common, unregulated diversion siphons water from the Delta.

Some Delta water users are allowed to divert natural flows from within the Delta. The United States Bureau of Reclamation (USBOR) and the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) have claimed that Delta farmers are taking more than the natural flows of the estuary, diverting stored water released from the reservoirs operated by USBOR and DWR. These water releases, from already historically low storage reservoirs, are mandated to meet water quality requirements and for the protection of fish and wildlife in the Delta. These releases will not accomplish their purpose to protect water quality and maintain habitat if Delta farmers continue to suck them out of Delta channels to maximize their short-term economic gains.

Meanwhile, water users served by the State Water Project received only five percent of their water allocations this year and Central Valley Project water users south of the Delta received NONE of their allocated water.

In July, the USBOR and DWR sent a letter calling for the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) to address these diversions. The letter requested that the SWRCB use its powers granted under the emergency regulations to call for proof of water rights from in-Delta diverters and monitoring information on the quantity of water diverted.

Meanwhile, much of the opposition to Proposition 1, the water bond on the November ballot, comes from these same Delta farmers, along with the South Delta Water Agency, Central Delta Water Agency and Restore the Delta, a NIMBY group that parades around as environmental advocates, leading the efforts.

Once again, Delta farmers and activists are putting their own narrow interests ahead of the public interest in responsible water management for California's residents, businesses, farmers, fish, wildlife and the environment. It needs to stop. The SWRCB must take swift action to curtail these illegal diversions. If they don't, the Legislature needs to step in quickly and rein in these scofflaws.



Delta Watch

A Project of the Coalition for a Sustainable Delta

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