



RAIN, RAIN EVERYWHERE... BUT BARELY A DROP GETTING TO RESIDENTS AND FARMS



Water flows over the Tisdale weir during a recent storm. Fremont weir also spilled water for the first time since 2012.

Over the past weeks, the Coalition for a Sustainable Delta has focused on the dramatic water supply impacts of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). As of March 15th, the ESA requirements for fish species, specifically salmon and smelt, have resulted in the loss of 727,000 acre feet of critical water supply being wasted to the ocean. Putting that in perspective we are talking about enough water for 6,462,222 residents or 181,750 acres of farmland and 5,636 farm jobs. The state and federal water supply pumps, which provide water to 25 million Californians and millions of acres of the state’s food basket, have been running well below capacity since the beginning of the year.

Even as we received prolonged and steady rain throughout the first two weeks of March, much of it has gone for naught. Put simply, water regulators have failed to capture storm water flows now streaming through the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. Most of the abundance brought by El Nino is simply being lost to the ocean.

The sad truth is that even though water flows in the Delta have more than doubled this year, less water is being provided for the state’s residents and farms than last year at the height of the worst drought in the state’s history. Policymakers need to be asking why and how to fix it.

U.S. Senator Diane Feinstein did just that earlier this month. The influential Democrat called on federal regulators to be more flexible in balancing water deliveries and fish protection efforts. Others need to follow suit. There is currently 10 times more water flowing through the Delta and out to Bay compared with a year ago, according to the Bureau of Reclamation. That water will continue to be lost if something isn’t done.

The state’s water system is broken and needs fixing. A start would be to implement improved conveyance such as the California WaterFix, more above ground and groundwater storage, and increased operating flexibility. These improvements would go a long way to capitalize on heavy flows, like those currently moving through the system.

Policymakers need to continue demanding that state and federal water supply regulators quit hiding behind the courts and figure this out. It makes absolutely no sense! Water that could be replenishing groundwater basins and putting farm workers back to work is simply being lost. It is an absolute tragedy and it’s time for policymakers to hold people accountable and demand solutions.

