

State board is unfairly taking water from San Joaquin Valley

By Adam Gray Special to The Bee

Our water crisis is both natural and man-made. Since California's last major reservoirs opened in the early 1970s, our population has grown by 67 percent, but our water storage capacity has grown by only 1 percent.

Last November, voters approved a \$7.5 billion bond issue to improve water infrastructure, build new storage and make our groundwater basins sustainable. The state has mandated reductions in water use of as much as 36 percent in some cities, and farmers have fallowed thousands of acres.

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I represent one of California's most economically challenged areas. It is also one of the world's most productive agricultural regions. While all Californians have to overcome the drought's impacts and the depletion of our groundwater basins, my district faces an additional, state-imposed challenge to its water supply – the emptying of our rivers into the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

In 2012, the State Water Resources Control Board decided to require a 35 percent increase in flows to the Delta from the Merced, Stanislaus and Tuolumne rivers. No such demands were made on other rivers.

These three rivers account for 5 percent to 7 percent of total flows into the Delta, so taking 35 percent more from them will produce only a 1 percent increase. This is barely measurable for the Delta, but the impact locally is devastating.

The reason given for the increased take from these three rivers is to restore endangered fish populations, but flow increases are not the exclusive answer. If they are approved, however, water previously saved for drinking and irrigation would flow into the Delta, where it would become available to other uses, urban and agricultural. It also could be transferred south through the canal, or run into the ocean.

Even before the drought, the state water board acknowledged the negative impact of increased flows on our groundwater basins, calling it "significant but unavoidable." The board has been very clear that there will be no mitigation, despite the fact that the three major reservoirs that serve our area were financed by local ratepayers and are not state or federal projects.

Last year, California adopted groundwater management legislation, which required mitigation for the impact of groundwater pumping on river flows. The measure should have included such relief when the state mandates increased surface water flows, but the state water board opposed this.

Our local communities have attempted to persuade the state board to change its plan. [Assembly Bill 1242](#), which would require the board to consider alternative measures to restore fish before approval of flow increases, recently passed in the Assembly.

All Californians know we need to pull together to overcome our water challenges. Pointing fingers is not productive. Every region of the state has been ordered to make significant cuts in water use, and our area is willing to do its part.



But in an especially hard-hit region, it makes little sense for the water board to insist on actions that will reduce storage that the state did not pay for in the first place. Its plan would take water currently used for irrigation and drinking and would eliminate our best chance at recharging groundwater supplies – all without any relief for the devastation it will cause.

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