

Restoring salmon to San Joaquin River is the law

The San Joaquin River Restoration Program's cost increases are not related to salmon recovery, but to the inclusion of hundreds of millions of dollars of flood control, water infrastructure and groundwater bank improvements which are part of the program – improvements that benefit everyone.

But none of these improvements happens without the salmon-restoration imperative. The Bee should remind its readers that restoring salmon to the San Joaquin River is not about satisfying some utopian fantasy. It's about complying with state law.

Without the river-restoration settlement and its promise of salmon restoration, the state water board would likely require releases of water from Friant Dam to protect downstream water quality and fisheries, with none of the flood protection and water-supply benefits of the restoration program.

The colossal mistake here would be trying to decouple salmon recovery from the river restoration, when it is this component delivering the water supply, environmental and community benefits we have already seen. The life history of spring-run Chinook, historical evidence and current data suggest that salmon can, in fact, thrive in the San Joaquin River in the future.

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