

House Committee on Natural Resources

Field Hearing, Fresno, CA March 19, 2014

Witness: Mark Watte

Good Morning Chairman Hastings and Members

My grandfather emigrated from Belgium in 1909, share cropping in Southern California for 50 years. After World War II it was developed into housing and my father and uncle moved to Tulare County in 1958. They started with 560 acres and eventually split their partnership in 1984. My brother and I bought the business from our father in 1986 and have grown significantly since then. Today with my brother Brian, nephew Matthew, and Son-in-Law Jason; we milk 1,000 cows, raise 18,000 calves and farm 4,500 acres (7 square miles) of diversified row crops and have more recently started planting pistachios. We are like Norm and Cliff at our Farm Credit office, they all know our name.

I currently serve on 7 boards and commissions, of which 5 are directly related to water. Married for 41 years, 3 married daughters and 10 nearby grandchildren.

I don't know of anyone that is more committed or passionate about our area and way of life than myself.

For the last 2 decades, as a result of an onslaught of over-reaching rules and regulations spurred on by environmental activists, we have lost and continue to lose huge amounts of our potential surface water supply, for, in many cases, no tangible results. Overall, the fish populations are no better off and perhaps worse. The activist answer is to flush more water. Here are a couple of examples of what I am talking about.

1. Hundreds of thousands of acre-feet of water flows to the Sacramento Delta to improve water quality-quality degraded by the neighboring cities dumping low quality sewage into the river. Solution by dilution is not an answer. By the way, the water coming from Hetchy-Hetchy reservoir that supplies San Francisco, home of Senators Boxer and Feinstein and Congresswomen Pelosi, does not contribute any water toward this effort and today that reservoir has one of the highest percent of capacity in the entire state.
2. Pumping water through the delta is one of the key components of our State wide water system. These pumps are severely restricted ostensibly to protect a 3 inch bait fish that isn't even indigenous to the delta! This is only a ruse used by the same activists. They don't care about fish, they just don't want us to get our entitled water. If any of these groups really cared about fish they would be talking about a huge stressor on salmon and smelt population, the striped bass.

3. Another big chunk of east side water is now being lost to support a river restoration effort that after several years is failing miserably. I believe another presenter will be discussing this in more detail.
4. In 1992 CVPIA committed 1.2 million acre feet to environmental uses that anyone today would be hard pressed to show any tangible results. Also, none of the water used for any of these “environmental programs” were paid for or held accountable for the benefits achieved.

These are but a few “leaks” on our developed water supply in California. These coupled with a three-year drought has brought us to where we are today. President Obama, Governor Brown, and Senator Feinstein have put forward initiatives to spend hundreds of millions of dollars to mitigate drought damage. WE DON'T NEED MONEY-WE NEED WATER! It is preposterous to offer to billions of dollars to combat climate change/global warming and think that will help the California water supply.

Any meaningful substantive progress in improving our situation has to begin with some common sense injected into the entire endangered species discussion.

What we need to look at is what has worked-there are many cases of this-but where is the law being used for reasons other than species recovery. Without some reasoned middle ground in the debate no real progress can be achieved. Another significant aspect relative to the overreach of the ESA is the huge increased cost of building any water related projects. We have totally lost our sense of balance between making significant positive advances with minimal negative effects.

Case in point. I'm Thomas Edison and just invented electricity. I am now filing my EIR, which will include among many others state and federal fish and game, NEPA, CEPA. It would read like this – I have invented an energy source that will revolutionize the way we live. But to transmit this energy we will need to build a transmission line along our roads. To do this we will need to cut down a tree to make a pole and they will be every 300 feet along our roads. The bottoms of the poles will need to be treated so that they will not rot; distracted drivers could run off the road and kill themselves running into a pole. The overhead wire will not be attractive and once in awhile an endangered Swainsons Hawk will touch 2 of the wires and we will have a BBQ'd hawk. Would we have electricity today, and at what cost? Ask yourself if having power is worth it? Of course it is. So is having an abundant affordable food supply.

In conclusion, Congressman Nunes and I were recently featured in a far-reaching article that pointed out many of the absurdities of farming in California. The response has been overwhelming positive. This country still has many common sense people. It makes me hopeful that perhaps there is a realization that the pendulum of extremism needs to be moderated.

Thank you Mr. Chairman and all of the Members for taking time to listen to our concerns.