

Statement of
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Before the U. S. House of Representatives
Committee on Resources
Subcommittee on Water and Power

Concerning “San Joaquin River Restoration”

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Subcommittee Chairman Radanovich and members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the historic San Joaquin River Restoration Settlement which was signed last week.

This is a significant achievement that will have lasting positive impacts on fisheries and the natural environment while protecting farmers and the Central Valley economy. It creates a clear obligation to the settling parties, but more importantly, an incredible opportunity to achieve an historic restoration of a western river.

All Californians will be the beneficiaries of the environmental, economic, recreational, water management and flood protection success our collective efforts will help to create. As a fourth generation Californian, I personally look forward to the restoration of California's second largest river as a significant milestone in responsible environmental stewardship.

The State of California has joined with federal agencies and other settling parties to sign a Memorandum of Understanding to help implement the Stipulation of Settlement. The planned enhancements on the state's second largest river will have far-reaching benefits.

State agencies, including the Resources Agency, the California Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Water Resources and Department of Fish and Game and the settling parties have pledged to work collaboratively to plan, design, fund, and implement actions to support the restoration project.

The restoration of the San Joaquin River has long been elusive. Many thought that it could never be done. I urge you to seize this opportunity and to work toward making this dream a reality.

History of the San Joaquin River

Originating at 10,000 feet in the form of crystalline snow pack in the southern Sierras, the San Joaquin's original river bed stretches for 350 miles, making it California's second longest river.

Tragically, however, the San Joaquin has long been recognized as one of California's most damaged rivers. Dammed 60 years ago, it was engineered to save Central Valley farmers from economic ruin. Responsible for the irrigation of more than one million acres of farmland, the San Joaquin River has played a central role in the development and success of some of California's most important and productive agricultural areas.

Along with the economic prosperity and agricultural bounty brought by altering the path and flow of the San Joaquin, came environmental consequences. Construction of dams, channels and levees, during the last 100 years, has modified the river, changing its natural streambed.

These diversions and modifications of the San Joaquin have resulted in diminished and, in some cases, near elimination of, Chinook salmon runs. Prior to the construction of the Friant Dam in 1942, the San Joaquin River was the southernmost habitat for salmon in North America. However, the diversion of water from the upper reaches of the river and subsequent reduced flows has significantly reduced the number of Chinook salmon native to the river.

Additionally, the habitat of the endangered kit fox has been largely degraded, and seasonal wetlands and the migratory birds they host have both been severely compromised as a result of human impact on the river.

Even more troubling, lack of adequate flows in the San Joaquin threatens the quality of local drinking water supplies.

But modern irrigation technology and other advances in water conservation and agriculture afford us an opportunity to make restoration possible, while still maintaining the health and prosperity of neighboring farmland.

Facts about the settlement and California's role

A key goal of the settlement is to minimize impacts to water users who depend upon the San Joaquin River. Under the plan, farmers will receive assurances of water supply and costs. The state will help to identify special projects and actions to meet these objectives.

Improvements on the San Joaquin River will focus on ecosystem restoration to return the river to more natural conditions. The State will design and construct

facilities to provide for fish passage and minimize fish entrainment, establish riparian habitat, and implement the best available science and monitoring procedures so the system can be adaptively and effectively managed.

Terms of the settlement mandate that water releases from Friant Dam will more than double, allowing native salmon to once again spawn and complete their lifecycle in the great San Joaquin.

To address flooding and better protect residents living along the San Joaquin River and adjoining areas, the state will work on new and existing projects related to flood protection including levee repairs and improvements, maintenance, levee relocation, and work on channel facilities.

While the state did not participate in negotiating terms of the Stipulation of Settlement, we recognized the importance of defining California's role in the implementation of this agreement. The Stipulation of Settlement and its Restoration and Water Management Goals provide the initial elements of a plan for restoration. The settling parties must now turn to working with the state, the many public and private interests along the San Joaquin River and the interested public, to establish an effective implementation plan for this historic settlement.

While this will not be a simple task, we are committed to working with all affected parties to ensure that it will be a success and that cost and other impacts are not passed on to other parties. The MOU is intended to set out the initial framework for state collaboration with the settling parties on implementation.

It requires two things so that we may achieve this goal together;

First, the Secretaries of Interior and Commerce, along with the California Secretaries of Environmental Protection and Resources, must establish a process by December 13, 2006 for the state and federal agencies to implement the settlement. This is important because the Stipulation of Settlement assigns to the Secretary of Interior many restoration tasks that will require California's participation and approval for them to be achieved.

Second, the state and the settling parties will establish a mechanism to ensure public participation and input into the implementation of the settlement. Clearly, there are many vested interests along the river and many that have already spent years working on restoration efforts. To successfully restore this river, we must work collaboratively with all of these interests.

Conclusion

The San Joaquin River is a critical waterway that serves as a crucial link in the state's vast water-delivery network. This jewel of California's Central Valley, as it's been called, is part of the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta. The Delta

supplies two-thirds of Californians, more than 22 million people, with their drinking water.

Years of negotiations have culminated in what can truly be called a landmark settlement. The San Joaquin River will once again become a living river, flowing as nature intended, from its headwaters in the High Sierra all the way to San Francisco Bay.

Governor Schwarzenegger has expressed his strong support for the terms of the settlement agreement. The State of California is committed to doing its part to achieve San Joaquin River restoration.

Chairperson Radanovich and committee members: I urge you to consider the paramount significance of this settlement, and I respectfully ask for your help in the long overdue restoration of the San Joaquin River.

Thank you.