

Brown administration official claims 'Delta can't be saved'

Dan Bacher, YubaNet, 4-22-13

Recreational anglers, commercial fishermen, Indian tribal leaders, family farmers, environmentalists, Delta residents and many elected officials strongly oppose the Bay Delta Conservation Plan (BDCP) to build the peripheral tunnels because they say it will lead to the extinction of Central Valley salmon, steelhead and other fish species.

Natural Resources Secretary John Laird and Governor Jerry Brown have constantly portrayed the BDCP as a visionary effort based on "science" to accomplish the "co-equal goals" of "ecosystem restoration" and "water supply reliability."

"Science has and will continue to drive a holistic resolution securing our water supply and substantially restoring the Delta's lost habitat," said Laird on March 28.

(<http://www.dailykos.com/story/2013/03/28/1197717/-More-Bay-Delta-Conservation-Plan-Documents-Released>)

However, a Brown administration official recently admitted that the Bay Delta Conservation Plan has nothing to do with saving the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta, the estuary that salmon, steehead, sturgeon, Delta smelt, striped bass and a host of other species depend on for survival.

While speaking with Tom Stokely of the California Water Impact Network (C-WIN) at a meeting with Northern California's Native American Tribes on Monday, April 15, Natural Resources Agency Deputy Director Jerry Meral said, "BDCP is not about, and has never been about saving the Delta. The Delta cannot be saved."

"I was flabbergasted because that's not what we've told by politicians and state officials," said Stokely after the meeting.

"Now if Governor Brown and State officials would just stop pretending it's a habitat plan to save fish when speaking with the press," according to Restore the Delta's "Delta Flows" newsletter
(<http://www.restorethedelta.org/or-is-it-the-point/>)

Zeke Grader, executive director of the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations, commented, "It is indeed ironic that the BDCP, a supposed habitat conservation plan/natural communities conservation plan developed pursuant, respectively, to the federal and state Endangered Species Act, is not about saving the Delta or its fish. It is rather a giant water grab by Westside San Joaquin agribusiness and SoCal land speculators. Meral has just admitted what we've been saying all along - that the BDCP is a trojan horse for a massive heist of California's water."

Political science, not natural science, drives BDCP

Meanwhile, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) have released new "red flag" documents in response to the administrative draft of the Bay Delta Conservation Plan that indicate that the prognosis for fish survival under the BDCP is not good, in contrast with Secretary Laird's false claim that the BDCP process is driven by "science."

These documents identify issues with BDCP that would make the fisheries agencies unwilling to issue the

necessary "take" permits for a habitat conservation plan under the Endangered Species Act.

"For example, the NMFS response identifies a potential for increased salmon egg mortality upstream resulting from release operations at Keswisk Reservoir at Shasta required by BDCP. Juvenile salmon in the Sacramento River would also be at risk under some scenarios," according to Restore the Delta (RTD).

"The likely extinction of winter and spring run Chinook salmon is an inevitable consequence of shifting water exports to the Spring months, which is what BDCP wants to do. Reducing flows in the upper Sacramento River in summer and fall of dry years creates problems that are not going to go away," RTD stated.

As for habitat in the Delta offsetting the loss of fresh water for fish, the USFWS called the prospects for fish such as Delta smelt and longfin smelt "uncertain."

"Since the point of a habitat conservation plan is to make things better for threatened species, not worse, you'd think a problem like this would be a game-changer. And it would, if the game weren't rigged. It would be just like BDCP planners to tweak the models to eliminate or disguise the obvious problems that keep arising when they look for ways to get lots of export water without harming fish," RTD said.

As Caleen Sisk, Chief and Spiritual Leader of the Winnemem Wintu Tribe, said, "The common people will pay for the tunnels and a few people will make millions. It will turn a once pristine waterway into a sewer pipe. It will be bad for the fish, the ocean and the people of California."

The Bay Delta Conservation Plan may be based on "science," but it's political science, not natural science, that drives the process. The only real goal of the BDCP is to export massive amounts of water to corporate agribusiness, Southern California water agencies and the oil industry, which is now expanding fracking operations in Kern County and coastal areas.

The Brown administration's terrible environmental record

The rush to build the peripheral canal or tunnel is not the only abysmal Schwarzenegger administration policy that the Governor Jerry Brown administration has continued and expanded.

Brown and Natural Resources Secretary John Laird continued the privately-funded Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) Initiative started by Governor Schwarzenegger in 2004. The conflicts of interest, failure to comprehensively protect the ocean, shadowy private funding, incomplete and terminally flawed science and violation of the Yurok Tribe's traditional harvesting rights have made the MLPA Initiative to create so-called "marine protected areas" into one of the worst examples of corporate greenwashing in California history.

In a huge conflict of interest, Catherine Reheis-Boyd, President of the Western States Petroleum Association, chaired the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) Initiative Blue Ribbon Task Force to create so-called "marine protected areas" in Southern California. Reheis-Boyd, the oil industry's lead lobbyist for fracking, offshore oil drilling, the construction of the Keystone XL Pipeline and the evisceration of environmental laws, also served on the MLPA task forces for the North Coast, North Central Coast and Central Coast.

The Brown administration also authorized the export of record water amounts of water from the Delta in 2011 -- 6,520,000 acre-feet, 217,000 acre feet more than the previous record of 6,303,000 acre feet set in 2005 under the Schwarzenegger administration.

Brown also presided over the "salvage" of a record 9 million Sacramento splittail and over 2 million other fish

including Central Valley salmon, steelhead, striped bass, largemouth bass, threadfin shad, white catfish and sturgeon in 2011. (<http://www.counterpunch.org/2012/05/07/carnage-in-the-pumps/>)

Other environmental policies of the Schwarzenegger administration that Brown and Laird have continued to include engineering the collapse of six Delta fish populations by pumping massive quantities of water out of the Delta; presiding over the annual stranding of endangered coho salmon on the Scott and Shasta rivers; clear cutting forests in the Sierra Nevada; supporting legislation weakening the California Environmental Water Quality Act (CEQA); and embracing the corruption and conflicts of interests that infest California environmental processes and government bodies ranging from the Bay Delta Conservation Plan to the regional water boards.