

It's the age of limits for California's water wars

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It has been 110 years since the San Francisco fire led to the damming of the Tuolumne River, cornering dubs on some of the world's most pristine water for that lucky city by the bay.

Hetch Hetchy water: It's the California luxury that the Bay Area has, for generations, taken for granted. And given how delicious it is, clear and sparkling, straight from Yosemite National Park, another coup that never stops being amazing, we're not surprised at how this week's dispatch from state water regulators is being viewed by its users – namely, as a water grab and a gathering emergency.

But the State Water Resources Control Board is overdue in its call to leave more water in the Tuolumne, Stanislaus and Merced rivers, not to mention the river they feed, the San Joaquin, which is one of the most heavily tapped in the state.

San Franciscans aren't the only ones bristling at the board's proposal that flows be doubled to save native salmon and other wildlife. San Joaquin Valley farmers have been yelling about fish lives mattering more than people and enlisting their lawyers.

The energy would be better spent focused on the collective need to help solve the problem. Times have changed.

This is the age of water limits, and the last four years of drought have trumped conversations the state needs to be having in an era of climate change and dwindling resources. So much demand has built for so long that five times as much water has been allocated in California as exists in the state's rivers.

The Sierra Nevada water that supplies 2.6 million businesses and homes in the Bay Area also supports the farm economies of the Central Valley, underpins a \$1.4 billion fishing industry that depends heavily on iconic species such as Chinook salmon, and prevents seeping saltwater from wrecking the massive Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. By the time the water in the San Joaquin River system makes it all the way to the Delta, four-fifths of it is gone.

To that end, we applaud State Water Resources Control Board Chairwoman Felicia Marcus for starting to put everything on the table, and giving everyone a chance to come up with workable alternatives. Gnashing and lawsuits are, as ever, guaranteed.

But the board should stick to its guns and not waver as it has on past calls for conservation. It pains us as much as the next Californian to say this, but with 39 million-plus people vying for every drop, we need to get real about water.

And nothing – not farmers, not subdivisions, not irrigated pasture land, not almonds, not even iconic cities that have spent the last century with their heads buried in their insanely great tapwater – can afford to be sacrosanct.