

Feinstein amendment is a water grab

George Miller, San Francisco Chronicle, 2-26-10

Rep. Miller, D-Martinez, is the former chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee.

Beware of the latest attempt at an old-fashioned water grab - the last gasp of an outdated approach to California's complex water problems.

Faced with a changing climate and an increasing number of competing demands on our water, most Californians now recognize that we cannot unilaterally change allocations of our scarce freshwater resources for one group or another without knowing first what the science says about the effects on the rest of the state. But the Westlands Water District of Fresno is old school. It crafted a backroom plan with Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-San Francisco, and Rep. Jim Costa, D-Hanford (Kings County), and Rep. Dennis Cardoza, D-Atwater (Merced County), to accelerate water withdrawals from the Sacramento River and San Francisco Bay-Delta ecosystem to guarantee themselves an increased water supply.

Its plan is overreaching, unjustified and unfair. It could wipe out the remaining Sacramento River salmon runs, permanently eliminating the Pacific Coast fishing industry jobs that were already under assault from drought and the mismanagement of our river systems during the Bush administration.

Its plan would harm Northern California water supplies and water rights. And it would undercut and paralyze recent significant statewide collaborative water efforts.

Members of Congress from across California, Oregon and Washington oppose this plan, as do California state legislators and county supervisors. Newspapers from Los Angeles to Sacramento to Oregon oppose it.

What we all understand is that times have changed. There has been a gradual but important shift toward the understanding that without a healthier bay-delta system, neither fisheries, cities nor farmers will ever see their water-supply situation improve.

That's why the Governor's Delta Vision Task Force argued that state policy must restore the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta ecosystem and create a more reliable water supply for California.

That's why state lawmakers wrote a package of water bills last year, and that's why water agencies, environmental groups and others have worked together on a comprehensive Bay-Delta Conservation Plan. That's why I have pushed through bills in Congress for Republicans and Democrats across our state to establish innovative water-recycling programs that free up freshwater and help industry, agriculture and municipalities.

That's also why I convened a series of meetings last summer with Sen. Feinstein and Reps. Costa and Cardoza, the Obama administration and others to work together to accomplish our shared goals of an improved Bay-Delta estuary and an improved California economy. Out of those meetings, we collaborated on several efforts, including getting \$100 million into the House jobs bill in December to fund the Obama administration's action plan for California water needs, including significant ecosystem restoration, drought relief, water quality improvements, and enhancements to the federal-state partnership.

It is regrettable that some of the people who had joined in this collaborative, fresh thinking have now turned against the state's better interests. The Westlands Water District plan is a major step backward. And so is the

fact that Westlands resigned this month from the Association of California Water Agencies to focus instead on lawsuits to get what they want.

We know that fixing the bay-delta estuary's problems will not be easy. The heart of our state's water system suffers from many ailments and requires a wide-ranging cure. One approach that will not fly, however, is the outdated idea of unilaterally changing water policy without the basis of sound scientific analysis.