

# San Francisco Chronicle

Jim Costa

Wednesday, February 24, 2010

With the Sierra Nevada snowpack 119 percent of normal, many regions of California expect to have a full allocation of their water supply. It is unfair and irrational that parts of the San Joaquin Valley could be suffering with a 10 percent allocation of contracted water this year that would have a devastating effect on one of our nation's agricultural heartlands. A commonsense amendment, like that which Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., Rep. Dennis Cardoza, D-Atwater (Merced County) and I are proposing, is vital to saving San Joaquin Valley agriculture and jobs. This amendment would provide the west side of the San Joaquin Valley with a 40 percent allocation of contracted water while other regions continue to receive their full supply. Equally important, our amendment does not waive or suspend the Endangered Species Act.

Last year, the Legislature and the governor took the first steps toward addressing long-term fixes of our water system for increased state population and overall need. But today, communities on the west side of the San Joaquin Valley are experiencing between 30 and 40 percent unemployment, and it seems that the Obama administration and congressional leadership are ignoring the impacts of this regulatory drought. These effects were clearly pointed out when the situation was described by a U.S. District Court in Fresno as "catastrophic" for farms, businesses, cities and counties that depend on water delivered by the Central Valley Project and the State Water Project.

For two years now, we have been operating under a flawed biological opinion regarding the delta smelt that blamed pumping water south as the sole factor for the decline in the health of the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta. So, while pumping was restricted to save the fish, oil refineries in Contra Costa and Solano counties continued to dump nitrates into the delta. Until multiple pollutants, like nitrates, ammonia from municipal sewer plants and other factors, are identified in the delta's decline, we will never be able to restore the health of the delta.

With above average runoff expected, there is no reason the state and federal water project pumps should not be running at or near full capacity. Instead, because of restraints on the pumping, we are losing between 10,000 and 18,000 acre-feet of water per day that could be going into storage in the San Luis Reservoir for future water deliveries throughout the state. Unless changes are made quickly, the net result could be more than 1 million acre-feet of water lost over the next four months with no meaningful benefit to the delta.

I have tried to reach solutions with everyone involved with California water to end this unsound policy, keep the pumps running at full capacity and improve delta health. The lack of support from the Bay Area congressional delegation is unwarranted and shocking. The proposed Feinstein amendment is not the final fix to ensure sustainable water for the San Joaquin Valley, but it will help provide a minimal water supply for the next two years.

Jim Costa, D-Hanford, represents Kings and parts of Kern and Fresno counties in the U.S. House of Representatives.

This article appeared on page **A - 8** of the San Francisco Chronicle