



California Sportfishing Protection Alliance

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Myths, Lies and Damn Lies

Despite drought, Valley agriculture doing far better than rest of economy

Stockton, CA – Sunday, June 28, 2009. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar is in Fresno today to attend a meeting and listen to the economic woes of the south Valley. Newspapers and airways are awash with accusations that a three-inch fish has caused a man-made drought in California and that environmentalists and fishermen seek to “starve people in order to save whales.” Congressmen, farmers and water agencies claim that 450,000 or more acres of land have been fallowed and 35-50,000 people have been put out of work: all because of Delta smelt and the Endangered Species Act. But, facts are stubborn things. And the facts tell us that these accusations are lies – bald-face lies.

“We hope Secretary Salazar will seek out the facts and see through the transparent efforts by Governor Schwarzenegger, Valley elected officials and the hydrologic brotherhood to use the red-herring of economic recession as justification for depriving the Delta of essential water,” said CSPA Executive Director Bill Jennings. “Their efforts can only be successful if the Secretary, reporters and the general public ignore the facts,” he said, adding, “The truth is more water won’t wash away the Valley’s recession and endangered species are the victims, not the problem.”

According to official data collected by the California Economic Development Department, during three years of drought, between May of 2006 and May of 2009, farm employment went up 13.7% in Kern County, 12.1% in Fresno County, 19.3% in Tulare County, 2% in Merced County, 5.3% in Madera and 8.4% in Stanislaus County.¹ Only in the smallest agricultural county of Kings, did we find a decline. While we’re told that 262,000 acres have been fallowed in Fresno County, the County’s Department of Agriculture was releasing a report that revealed 2008 was another record year with agricultural production dollars up 5.9% over the previous record year of 2007.²

San Joaquin Valley farm unemployment has always been high and, while the present economic disaster has exacerbated conditions, farm unemployment has not fluctuated according to wet and

¹ CSPA Table, *Monthly Farm Employment* (attached) extracted from EED Data, <http://www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov/?pageid=166>.

² *2008 Agricultural Crop and Livestock Report*, Fresno Department of Agriculture, page I, available on CSPA website: www.calsport.org.

dry years.³ Indeed, agriculture has fared far better in the current recession than other segments of the economy. While May 08 to May 09 construction, manufacturing, trade & transportation and financial employment in Fresno County dropped by 3,000, 2,300, 1,200 and 900, respectively: agricultural employment actually increased by 100.⁴ Tulare County reports that while, agricultural employment increased by 2,100 between May 08 and May 09, construction, manufacturing, trade & transportation, hospitality and financial employment was down 800, 1,100, 1,300, 400 and 500, respectively.⁵ Even in counties reporting slight declines in agricultural employment: other employment sectors experienced far greater drops. In the last year of a three-year drought (May 08-May09), statewide farm employment dropped by only 9,600 while nonfarm employment plunged 744,400.⁶ Indeed, employment figures for counties for north-of-Delta counties that are receiving full water allotments are showing similar employment impacts.

Who is not telling the truth: our elected representatives or the California Employment Development Department? And, who is distorting the truth about actual water shortages?

As Department of Water Resources Director Lester Snow pointed out in a 15 May 2009 letter to Senator Dianne Feinstein, Westlands Water District is expected to receive 86% of its normal water supplies in this third year of drought; Kern Count Water Agency is expecting 85% and the San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors will receive 100% of its non-drought supplies.⁷ The chart attached to Snow's letter claims that Westlands' 14% shortfall will force it to fallow 225,000 acres rather than its normal fallowing of 78,000 acres and Kern County Water Agency's 15% shortfall will compel it to fallow 220,000 acres rather than the normal 100,000 acres.⁸ The numbers simply don't add up.

Mr. Snow was candid when he wrote Senator Feinstein that, "I believe many have lost sight of the plain fact that we are in a hydrologic drought, and as such water supplies are simply limited for all users"⁹ and when he testified to Congress that, if there was no court order protecting fish, there would only be a 5% increase in water to the Central Valley.

Unfortunately, Mr. Snow and those who scapegoat fisheries seem unable to admit that water supplies in a drought are also limited for fish and wildlife and that recent biological opinions provide less water for the environment during shortages. Nor can they acknowledge that California has issued water rights for 8 _ times the average amount of water in the Bay-Delta watershed or that Valley farmers have recently planted hundreds of thousands of acres of

³ CSPA Table, *Industry Employment & Labor Force by Annual Average, 2000-2008*, extracted from EED data, <http://www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov/?pageid=166>.

⁴ CSPA Table, *Farm and Nonfarm Employment May 08 v. May 09*, extracted from EED Data, <http://www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov/?pageid=166>.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Industry Employment & Labor Force*, Employment Development Department, Labor Market Information Division, June 19, 2009. (Attached)

⁷ Letter from Lester Snow, DWR, to Honorable Dianne Feinstein, May 15, 2009. Available on CSPA website: www.calsport.org.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

perennial crops based upon the most junior water rights that assume interrupted supplies during the inevitable droughts that occur more than a third of the time in the state.

Those who accuse fishermen and environmentalists of trying to “starve families to protect whales” appear incapable of exhibiting compassion for the depressed communities along the coast and wrecked livelihoods of commercial fishermen whose boats are either dry-docked or repossessed by the bank or lamenting the 23,000 people out of work or the \$1.4 billion lost to the state’s economy because of fishing closures. And what of those on the Westside of the Valley who irrigate selenium laced soils that discharge toxic wastes back to the river and Delta? Do they believe they have a prerogative to water that leaves the Delta with salinity levels that threaten the existence of generations of Delta farmers who cultivate over 400,000 acres of some of the finest prime soils on earth?

There is enough water in California to provide for people and rivers, if it’s used wisely. Reclamation, recycling, groundwater banking, conservation and desalination offer a virtual river far larger than any additional supplies secured via new surface storage or a peripheral canal. Fish are not the problem. “A dysfunctional water delivery system, greed and failure to comply with existing laws have brought us to the edge of disaster,” observed Jennings. “Common sense, sound science and a proper respect for law can lead us back from the abyss,” he said.

CSPA is a non-profit public benefit conservation and research organization established in 1983 for the purpose of conserving, restoring, and enhancing the state’s water quality and fishery resources and their aquatic ecosystems and riparian habitats. CSPA’s website is:
www.calsport.org.