

The California Water Plan Update (Public Review Draft), Bulletin 160-98, State of California, The Resources Agency, Department of Water Resources, January 1998, 692 pages plus Appendixes.

Review by Don Villarejo

Every five years the California Department of Water Resources promulgates a "water plan" update that reflects the official state administration view of water policy issues. Public comment and review is a part of the process of adoption of the plan. In the case of the present report, input was due by March 31, 1998. This year's edition of the state water plan is the largest ever: more than seven hundred pages of narrative, charts, tables and photographs.

The document is an excellent and reliable source of information on the performance of the world's largest man-made water supply system. And this system is indeed mammoth. It has been reported that California's dams, reservoirs and aqueducts, and the Great Wall of China, are the only man-made artifacts that can be seen from orbital spacecraft.

What is especially striking in the current document is the prominence of environmental concerns. From a "Note to Reviewers" on the very first page of narrative, where the CALFED Bay-Delta Program is discussed along with the Central Valley Project Improvement Act Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement, through the final paragraph of Chapter 10 (Conclusions), where restoration and protection of fish and wildlife habitat is discussed, concerns for environmental uses of water are

strongly emphasized. The extent of this discussion of the importance of environmental concerns in the current report contrasts with the content of earlier editions of Bulletin 160. A generation ago, water supply concerns and the challenge of meeting urban and agricultural needs dominated the pages.

more than one-third of agricultural water demand.¹ Agriculture's demand is projected to fall by 2.3 million acre-feet per year. Thus, water supplies for new urban growth in California will be provided at the expense of agriculture.

The report also indicates that water demand will exceed supplies,

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One of the most far-reaching conclusions of the report is the projection of water needs of the three major sectors through the Year 2020. According to the state's water experts, both urban and environmental water demand will increase by that year, but agricultural water demand will decline. The largest change will be for urban water demand, amounting to an estimated 37% increase. Agricultural demand will decrease by about 7%, and environmental demand will increase by 2.6%. Of course, these projections are based on the assumption of "normal" water supplies, i.e., the absence of prolonged drought.

Most striking in these projections of water demand is that the split between urban and agricultural uses will be dramatically altered. According to the report, urban demand is expected to increase by 3.2 million acre-feet per year in the Year 2020, and will total

even in non-drought years. The amount of the projected "water supply shortage" is expected to remain at 1.4 million acre-feet per year.

Curiously, little is said about stringent controls on water use. In contrast with Arizona, a state that also has an expanding population and limited water supplies, California has no controls on ground water pumping nor do we even require metering of water use. Just about anyone can drill a well on their property and pump to their heart's content irrespective of the consequences for the ground water table. Indeed, during the 1987-92 drought tens of thousands of new wells were drilled in the Central Valley. Absent any controls or water meters, individual land owners can choose to ignore state "goals" as described in Bulletin 160.

Equally disturbing is the absence of discussion of the torrent of profiteering at public expense unleashed by new federal water marketing rules. Already, the Bass brothers of Texas have purchased, and then sold at a handsome profit, more than 40,000 acres of Imperial Valley

¹ One million acre-feet is a measure of water volume, covering one million acres of land at a depth of one foot. This amount can meet the water consumption needs of approximately 200,000 households for one year, or irrigate about 300,000 acres of cropland.

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allowed school districts the freedom to design appropriate programs for educating limited English speakers, while holding the districts responsible for the students' progress.¹ However the bill was stalled by resistance from Latino and bilingual interests, who feared that the measure would have allowed school districts to abandon traditional bilingual programs. The bill's failure paved the way for the Unz initiative, which not only allows, but requires, an end to first-language instruction.

If the Unz initiative passes, as many believe it will, it will set a precedent for the nation. In some states there is a growing interest in ending bilingual teaching, while in others – particularly border states such as Florida and Texas – there are movements to increase the bilingual capacities of students, improving their speaking and writing abilities in both languages. In these areas bilingual abilities are a plus in the job market. Unz's critics complain that even if English immersion does prove to be more effective than bilingual education, it does nothing to preserve native languages, and these skills will be lost as students learn to communicate solely in English.

However, even if the Unz initiative does pass, it is far from clear that it will immediately change the way English is taught in California. It is likely that the initiative will be challenged on the basis of the 1974 *Lau vs. Nichols* U.S. Supreme Court decision, which prohibits English-only instruction.² Others feel that the initiative violates the language rights laid out in the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, which ceded California to the United States in 1848. Whether or not English immersion replaces bilingual education, it is clear to all that changes must be made in order to guarantee

immigrant students a better chance to succeed in this English-dominated society.

¹ Jon Matthews, "Bilingual Education Bill Stalls in Assembly," *The Sacramento Bee*, September 5, 1997.

² Patrisia Gonzales and Roberto Rodriguez, "Bilingual Wars Create Lower Expectations," Universal Press Syndicate, 1997.

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Project, "They will try to get [welfare recipients] to work in the fields. They'll terminate the people or the people will quit because they can't handle it. And the growers will say, 'There are no people. Bring on the *braceros*.'"²

At the Cal-Work Summit, there was legitimate talk about improvements needed to make agricultural jobs more appealing to those coming off of welfare. But the discussion fell short of any commitment to improvements in wages or benefits, and many farm operators held steadfastly to the opinion that welfare recipients would have no choice but to take the available jobs, no matter how unattractive. But no one will be surprised when this spring fails to find large numbers of California's farm jobs filled by welfare recipients. And proponents of a new guest worker program will be quick to claim that all options have been exhausted, and guest workers are the only answer to agriculture's hunger for poverty-wage workers.

¹ "Fact Sheet: California Welfare Population," California Department of Social Services, Information Services Bureau, September 1997.

² Dennis Pollock, "From welfare to farm work," *The Fresno Bee*, 11/30/97.

**(CONTESTED EDEN** *from page 4)*

Put together, these varied accounts, as well as the historic illustrations that augment them, provide a well-rounded picture of California's pre-Gold Rush history. The mention of various historical figures in the different chapters, in different situations told from different points of view, brings to life the many sides of these complex and often misunderstood pioneers. Sadly, it also becomes clear that the history of European settlement in California is one of arrogance and intolerance, of races and cultures destroying one another in their struggles to dominate this land.

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land and accompanying water rights. The buyer was U.S. Filter Corp., a corporation that most recently purchased the Culligan water supply business. The water in this case comes from the federal Colorado River project through public conveyances.

On the other hand, the report is clear that new dams or reservoirs are not among the primary options for meeting future water needs. Rather, the report looks to water demand management options – reducing demand – as the key to California's water future, "By making wiser use of water, the need for new sources of supply can be lessened."

Finally, the report asserts that "California should be able to meet its future water service reliability needs through a variety of local and statewide water management options, while protecting and enhancing fish and wildlife habitats." But if water is to be transferred from agricultural to urban use, what will happen to the rural and agricultural communities that will be transformed from oasis back to desert? On this key issue the report is silent.

