



# Westlands Water District

3130 N. Fresno Street, P.O. Box 6056, Fresno, California 93703-6056, (559) 224-1523, FAX (559) 241-6277

## WESTLANDS' FOOD FOR THOUGHT

### THE WEEKLY REPORT ON CALIFORNIA'S BROKEN WATER SYSTEM

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## NRDC's Own Facts



Westlands Water District strongly believes discussions related to the resolution of important water policy issues should be based on facts. It is for that reason that Westlands recently acknowledged, “because of the extremely wet hydrology, the ESA and other regulations have not restricted CVP operations in 2017.” In his recent “Expert Blog,” Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) Attorney, Doug Obegi, seized on this “admission” as evidence that “some irrigation districts and special interest groups representing corporate agribusinesses are twisting the facts to complain about the federal Central Valley Project’s “mere” allocation of [65% for south-of-Delta Central Valley Project agricultural water service contractors.]” The great irony is that it is Mr. Obegi who is twisting the facts.

Immediately after quoting Westlands’ “admission,” Mr. Obegi asserts “[i]n the past few years, protections for Delta Smelt have had little to no impact on water supply, as drought was the overwhelming cause of reductions in water supply (protections for endangered salmon have had some impacts on supply, but even those impacts were small compared to hydrologic changes).” Mr. Obegi’s statement is demonstrably false.

In terms of California’s hydrologic record, 2016 was an average water year, but south-of-Delta CVP agricultural water service contractors received a 5% allocation. A major factor causing this low allocation was pumping reductions at the C. W. “Bill” Jones Pumping Plant imposed under the 2008 biological opinion for the protection of the Delta smelt. But do not take Westlands’ word for it; instead, review the “change orders” transmitted by the Bureau of Reclamation to the operator of the Jones Pumping Plant directing that pumping be reduced to protect the Delta smelt. Those change orders, which are public documents available to Mr. Obegi, are posted on Westlands’ web page at: <http://wwd.ca.gov/about-westlands/blog/>.

Westlands estimates that during the 2016 water year, the water supply costs to the CVP resulting from reduced pumping under the Delta smelt biological opinion was approximately 252,000 acre-feet compared to operations under Water Rights Decision 1641, the order adopted by the State Water Resources Control Board to protect water quality, fisheries, and public trust resources in the Delta. (For the CVP and State Water Project, the combined loss of water was approximately 820,000 acre-feet.)

Mr. Obegi's assertion that "protections for endangered salmon have had some impacts on supply, but even those impacts were small compared to hydrologic changes" is also demonstrably false.

On April 30, 2016, storage in Shasta Reservoir was 4.233 million acre-feet (MAF), relatively good hydrologic conditions compared to the historical record. For comparison, end-of-April storage at Shasta in 2015 was 2.662 MAF. Total inflow into Shasta Reservoir in the 2016 water year was 5.335 MAF, or 107% of the 15 year average, compared to 3.602 MAF in 2015. In the spring of 2016, because of those good hydrologic conditions Reclamation forecasted that after pumping restrictions under the Delta smelt biological opinion and the 2009 salmonid biological opinion were lifted on June 30, it would be able to operate the Jones Pumping Plant at capacity for the remainder of the water year by making releases from relatively abundant storage in Shasta Reservoir. But Reclamation's plan to operate the Jones Pumping Plant at capacity after June 30 was frustrated because the National Marine Fisheries Service implemented a provision of the 2009 salmonid biological opinion to limit releases from Shasta Reservoir to protect winter run Chinook salmon.

When the 2016 water year ended, on September 30, 2016, storage in Shasta Reservoir was 2.811 MAF, compared to 1.603 MAF in storage on September 30, 2015. A very conservative estimate of additional water that could have been delivered to the San Joaquin Valley, but for the limitations imposed on releases from Shasta Reservoir under the salmonid biological opinion, is 300,000 acre-feet.

So, in 2016, the Delta smelt biological opinion and the salmonid biological opinion combined to reduce south-of-Delta CVP water supplies by approximately 552,000 acre-feet. That is equivalent to an additional 30% allocation for south-of-Delta CVP agricultural water service contractors.

Had Mr. Obegi, limited his comment to the 2014 and 2015 water years, it would have been accurate. In those years, extraordinarily dry conditions overwhelmed impacts caused by pumping restrictions under the two biological opinions. But Mr. Obegi did not limit his comment to those water years. Instead, he said in the "past few years," which ignores water supply impacts in the most recent water year, 2016. And with the exception of 2011, another exceptionally wet year, and 2014 and 2015, exceptionally dry years, the 2008 and 2009 biological opinions have caused significant reductions in water supplies for south-of-Delta CVP agricultural water service contractors in each year of their implementation.

The late Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan is reported to have said, "[e]veryone is entitled to his own opinion, but not his own facts." Mr. Obegi and his colleagues do a disservice to the public when they persist in ignoring this aphorism. One additional overriding fact Mr. Obegi and his colleagues continue to ignore – the laws and policies that NRDC has promoted and supported over the past 25 years have failed. They have failed the people of California, school districts, communities, farmworkers, small business owners, and farmers. And, unfortunately, they have failed the fish and wildlife that the NRDC claims to want to save.

**It's time for honesty in the very worthwhile debate about how YOUR water is being prioritized.**