

The “Governator”, Global Warming, & New Dams

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California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger earlier this year triggered an outcry from West Coast environmental activists when he included provisions to build two new surface water storage facilities in his 2007-08 state budget. The two proposed projects – Sites Reservoir, in the Sacramento Valley, and Temperance Flat Reservoir on the San Joaquin River near Fresno – are part of a \$4 billion water supply bond that would go before voters in 2008, if the Democrat-controlled State Legislature can be swayed.

Gov. Schwarzenegger’s move is a bold one. We’re talking about a state where Bay Area and SoCal environmental activists have many politicians and media reporters convinced that rapidly expanding water demand (caused, in part, by millions of new residents moving to the state) can be met simply by forcing farmers to either conserve more or simply sell out and give up their water. Due in part to this dynamic, the state of California on its own has not constructed a new surface storage facility in over three decades.

The two projects supported by Gov. Schwarzenegger are supported by farmers but opposed by many state Democrats and environmentalists.

The “Governator” has employed an interesting strategy in his endeavor to put surface storage back on the table. In 2005, Gov. Schwarzenegger ordered the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) to commission a report in to help the state prepare for an altered climate. Last July, the final report was released, and showed that, as global warming continues and California's mountain snowpack decreases, the state can expect to see a drastic drop in its drinking and farm water supplies, as well as more frequent winter flooding. Those findings were pointed to by DWR officials in the wake of the governor’s budget announcement, who explained that more reservoirs are one way to address the problem.

Regardless of whether or not they are global warming believers, reasonable people agree that, just to manage our resources to generate the same yield we've been used to from existing water projects, we'll need more storage. That’s to say nothing about the implications for flood control.

However, some environmental activists, who are both driving and reveling in the publicity created by Al Gore’s widely seen movie, *An Inconvenient Truth* – and who are further emboldened by new Congressional leadership that intends to further highlight global warming issues in the next two years – are in a bit of a quandary on this one. You would think that taking decisive action to help solve one problem associated with the dreaded global warming would be welcomed by these groups, and pointed to as further proof that their gloom-and-doom arguments are working. Well...not so, in this case.

Some of the most vocal champions of global warming are also the most strident critics of new dams. Using new dams as a means of countering potential impacts associated with global warming puts the environmentalists on the defensive.

A spokesman for the Natural Resources Defense Council – a massive environmental organization that is a chief stirrer of the global warming pot, and vocal critic of dams – veered away from the global warming argument and instead tried the time-honored tactic of putting the blame on so-called “corporate” farmers.

“The advocates of these proposals are extremely well heeled agricultural interest looking for another handout,” said Barry Nelson, a senior policy advocate at NRDC, in the *Sacramento Bee*.

"This is about subsidizing water users," he told the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

Actually, this is about leadership. There are many reasons why new storage facilities have not been built in California and other parts of the West in the past thirty years. A regulatory quagmire resulting from uncoordinated and inefficient application of federal environmental regulations, and an apparent inability by project sponsors to communicate the positive economic benefits of new storage projects are just two of those reasons. However, many close observers of Western water policy believe that the real reason why new storage projects have not been constructed is the lack of leadership shown with respect to this controversial issue.

Arnold Schwarzenegger is charging into hostile political territory, and other Western politicians must follow his lead if irrigators are to have reliable water in the future.

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