

**State Water Board Bay-Delta Update and Sacramento and San Joaquin Unimpaired
Flows Proposal—Statewide Perspective:
Why It Matters to You No Matter *Where* You Are in California**

Prepared by the California Farm Bureau Federation, July 19, 2018

- **Siphoning Off Half of All Runoff from the State’s Two Largest Watersheds:** If adopted and implemented, the Board Bay-Delta Update would drastically reduce water supplies throughout California. Specifically, the water board’s standards would require releases of 30 to 50 percent of water in the Merced, Tuolumne and Stanislaus rivers, and 45 to 65 percent of flows from the Sacramento River, its tributaries (including the Feather, Yuba, and American rivers), and from the Eastside Delta tributaries (including the Mokelumne and Calaveras rivers).
- **Significant Impacts to Agriculture, to Regional Economies and to Disadvantaged Communities in the Central Valley.** The water board’s standards would damage regional economies throughout the Central Valley, both north and south of the Delta. Water and agriculture are the economic life-blood of the Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys. Drain it away, and the impacts will be severe.
- **A Direct Threat to Water Supplies in the Bay Area.** Beyond the Central Valley, the water board’s flow proposals threaten critical Bay Area water supplies in the Mokelumne and Tuolumne rivers.
- **Further, Drastic Reductions to Already Unreliable South-of-Delta Exports.** In addition to upstream impacts in the Central Valley and in the Bay Area, by impacting reservoir operations and reducing available water for junior water users, the water board’s proposal would inevitably reduce delta exports and, thus, water supplies to all points south, throughout Central and Southern California.
- **Will Frustrate Efforts to Balance Groundwater.** Major reductions in surface water supplies would greatly complicate or frustrate local efforts to balance groundwater basins under the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act of 2014.
- **Even Less Flexibility and Resiliency to Droughts.** The water board’s standards would greatly worsen California’s statewide water outlook, including our ability to cope with severe, extended droughts, like the recent 2012-15 drought.
- **Raising Already Daunting Obstacles to System Improvements.** The water board’s standards would make investing in our system to improve statewide water reliability more difficult. If adopted and implemented, the standards could drive up costs and reduce the relative benefits of possible water system improvements. By locking up millions of acre-feet of water, the standards could foreclose any options we may still have to put a little flexibility and reliability back into our system.

- **Water Rights Holders Everywhere, This Affects You Too!** As an assault on some of the most senior water rights in California, the water board’s proposal should concern water rights holders throughout the state. If the long-vested beneficial users of this water can be simply stripped of millions of acre-feet of water for no proportionate or properly proven benefit to fish, then no one, anywhere, is safe.
- **Contrary to the Board’s Assertions, It Won’t Help the Fish.** By focusing entirely on rigid, percentage-based flow standards while ignoring the role played by habitat, predator control, and other important stresses, the water boards flows would harm human beings—but they would *not* recover the salmon and other fish species the water board says it wants to protect.
- **Assuring Perpetual Shortage and Conflict.** By dumping water out of reservoirs in all year types, the proposed standards would lead to chronic shortages in *all* year types, throughout the state. This would escalate conflict and have major adverse impacts on all human uses of water—and it would *harm* affected fish, rivers, and ecosystems.
- **It Is an Unreasonable Use of Water Given Competing Demands and Better Alternatives.** The board’s flow standards are *not* reasonable or balanced. They are *not* reasonably calculated to actually help fish or the ecosystem. Moreover, they *do not* meet the California Constitution’s clear standard for reasonable and beneficial water use to ensure we are reasonably meeting *all* demands for water when faced with the reality of a finite supply.
- **‘Functional Flows’ vs. ‘Unimpaired Flows.’** As a far superior alternative to the water board’s over-reach with its unimpaired flow standards, water users in the Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys have made major investments in reasonable alternatives, demonstrating many on-the-ground successes. Local water agencies in recent years have made rapid advances through collaborative partnerships to improve habitat and other conditions for salmon and other fish species.
- **‘Voluntary Agreements.’** As opposed to the water board’s proposal, water users’ alternatives emphasize collaborative partnerships and measurable increases in fish populations. They emphasize “functional flows” in place of “unimpaired flows,” and include measures to address important “non-flow” factors including predation, the lack of habitat, fish passage, water temperatures and hatchery management. These robust alternatives have been freely offered in talks directed by Governor Jerry Brown to reach “voluntary agreements” in lieu of the water board’s standards. Unfortunately, as of July 2018, those talks appear to be at an impasse.
- **Statewide Adjudication.** Another severe consequence of the water board’s current approach, if adopted, is that it could well plunge much of the state into years, if not decades, of protracted court battles. In this event, all of the good-faith, local, voluntary efforts toward collaborative conservation would abruptly cease, as positions harden and attention shifts to the court room.