

Editorial: Klamath water grab attempt another reminder of how south state views north

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Apparently we see rivers differently here. In Oroville we watch the salmon leaping vainly at the fish barrier dam on the Feather. Along the Sacramento, otters play, and all variety of birds flock along the banks.

The rivers teem with life and really are the arteries that sustain the valley. They're the foundation of our entire ecosystem, and of our prosperity as well. Farming's complicated dance of water and soil and sun remains the foundation of our economic system. And farming depends on the rivers.

The rivers are living things, from our point of view. They ebb and flood with the seasons (usually), and resident populations of wildlife are joined by seasonal runs of fish and migrations of birds.

But elsewhere the rivers are just seen as pipes. Sterile conveyances to carry water to places that need it.

This was made obvious again recently by the lawsuit filed by two San Joaquin Valley water districts to try to block releases from reservoirs on the Trinity River to save the salmon population downstream along the lower Klamath River from a deadly parasite.

The pest, *Ichthyophthirius multifiliis*, commonly known as "ich," was responsible for killing 70,000 fish in the Klamath in 2002, during another time of low flows due to low supplies. Ich thrives when the water moves slowly and the fish are packed together.

So when ich turned up in fish tested last month, the Yurok Tribe and Humboldt County asked to have the flows increased to wash the bugger away. After some back and forth, the feds agreed.

That's when the Westlands Water District and San Luis and Delta-Mendota Water Authority sued — in a federal court in Fresno, mind you — to block the releases in a river hundreds of miles away.

Westlands spokeswoman Gayle Holman was quoted by [capitalpress.com](#) at the time as saying, "It's frustrating to see water that, when others have a zero water allocation ... may be a potential opportunity for additional water resources, and it's literally flushed out to the ocean."

See what we mean? The Trinity and Klamath are not living rivers in the eyes of some — they're just pipes. The water's "literally flushed out to the ocean" as if there was nothing in the water or along the banks that would in anyway be affected by the flow.

What's particularly obscene about this lawsuit is that the Trinity and the Klamath don't even flow into the Central Valley. They're North Coast rivers. The Klamath starts up in Oregon, the Trinity joins it in northern Humboldt County, and the combined flows reach the ocean between Eureka and Crescent City.

The only reason Trinity River water can get to the San Joaquin Valley at all is because we've gouged a huge tunnel through the mountains to get it to Whiskeytown Lake.

Yet two water districts, two watersheds and several hundred miles away, somehow feel crops unsuited to where they've been planted have a higher right to that water than the natural world that was born of the Trinity and Klamath, and depends upon their flows.

Luckily, their hometown judge didn't agree, and the water's still flowing. For now.

And we have one more reminder of how the rest of the state views the north.