

A week after visit to New Melones, Department of Interior blasts state water plan

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The Department of the Interior issued a [blistering attack](#) against the state's proposed water grab, saying it would "cripple the Central Valley's economy, farms and community."

The comments late Friday afternoon came a week after Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke [visited](#) Don Pedro and New Melones reservoirs at the request of Rep. Jeff Denham, R-Turlock.



Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, left, and Rep. Jeff Denham, speak with the press at Don Pedro Reservoir, Calif., Friday, July 20, 2018.

Earlier this month, the California State Water Resources Control Board issued a final proposal that would require 40 percent of unimpeded flows from February to June on the Tuolumne, Stanislaus and Merced rivers, which are tributaries into the San Joaquin River that feeds the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. The move, in what it says is an effort to save the Delta's failing ecosystem, angered farmers, politicians and many others throughout the Valley.

Opponents of the state's plan pointed to what they say will be massive negative impacts on the Valley's economy, agriculture and land values, among other things.

The Interior's comments Friday were part of an [eight-page letter](#) to board chairwoman Felicia Marcus, and stated the proposal appears "to directly interfere with the New Melones

Project's ability to store water. The Board amendments essentially elevate the Project's fish and wildlife purposes over the Project's irrigation and domestic purposes contrary to the prioritization scheme carefully established by Congress."

It also pointed to the effects on New Melones' water storage and the potential to diminish power generation, as well as issues surrounding the area's recreational opportunities. Water from New Melones, which also provides water for the Central Valley Project, flows into the [Stanislaus River](#).

Marcus, [in an article](#) she wrote for The Sacramento Bee defending the plan, said "Yes, leaving more water to flow into the Delta from both the San Joaquin and Sacramento watersheds will be challenging for water users, which is why the proposal sends more water but still less than what is optimal for fish and wildlife. Water users can adapt – by switching crops, becoming more efficient and storing more water in wet times. In contrast, species pushed to the brink of extinction have few options."

Meanwhile, Denham recently added an amendment to keep federal agencies from depleting New Melones as part of the Interior's appropriations bill. His amendment passed through Congress.

"Under Sacramento's plan, the Valley will suffer skyrocketing water and electricity rates," Denham said in a statement released Saturday. "After a decade and millions of our money spent on a study that they required, the board ignored the science based proposal that would save our fish while preserving our water rights. We will not allow them to take our water and destroy our way of life."

On the day of Zinke's visit to Don Pedro and New Melones, Dennis Mills, a member of the Calaveras County Board of Supervisors, sent a letter to President Trump imploring his administration to step in. He, too, pointed to the impacts the plan would have on New Melones.

"Simply put," he wrote, "this proposal places a higher value on fish than people!"

Friday's letter to Marcus from the Interior Department came on the same day public comment on the issue closed. The department also asked that the water board postpone its scheduled [Aug. 21-22 meetings](#) in Sacramento, where it will consider adopting [the plan](#).

On Aug. 20, a rally to "[Stop The State Water Grab](#)" will be held at noon on the north steps of the Capitol building in Sacramento. For more information or to RSVP, contact Assemblyman Adam Gray's office at 209-726-5465.

Videos link: <https://www.modbee.com/latest-news/article215284145.html>

<https://www.modbee.com/latest-news/article215698545.html>

(FOR addendum: Rep. Denham's Interior Appropriations amendment had passed the House of Representatives, not the Congress, at the time when this article was written.)