

Denham, Dept. of Interior agree that controversial Calif. water plan harmful to Central Valley

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The commissioner of the U.S. Department of the Interior's (DOI) Bureau of Reclamation is on the same side as U.S. Rep. Jeff Denham (R-CA) regarding contentious amendments the California State Water Resources Control Board has proposed to the Water Quality Control Plan for the San Francisco Bay/Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Estuary.

Earlier this month, the U.S. House approved a DOI 2019 appropriations bill that includes two amendments championed by Rep. Denham aiming to prevent the Sacramento-headquartered board's plan from moving forward, and to store water in his California district's Central Valley region.

The congressman also this month hosted DOI Secretary Ryan Zinke's tour of the Don Pedro and New Melones Reservoirs, which would become significantly drained under the plan, according to Rep. Denham.

"Sacramento's radical water grab would cripple the Central Valley's economy, farms and community. Secretary Zinke saw that when he visited New Melones and Don Pedro reservoirs with me," Rep. Denham said. "They cannot drain our reservoirs and ignore our concerns. I will continue fighting to make sure Central Valley voices are heard."

Likewise, Reclamation Bureau Commissioner Brenda Burman wrote in July 27 comments sent to Felicia Marcus, chair of the State Water Resources Control Board, that its draft amendments "contemplate management by others of a Reclamation project and appear 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," Burman wrote. "Notably, implementation of the 40-percent unimpaired flow standard will reduce storage of water at New Me Jones by 315,000 acre-feet per year, on average – even after taking into account likely reductions to Central Valley Project contract deliveries."

Such a flow standard, she wrote, would likely result in reduced power generation and recreational opportunities.

“Reclamation, therefore, recommends the Board reconsider the Board Amendments and postpone the public meeting currently scheduled for August 21-22, 2018, for additional due diligence and dialogue,” according to Burman’s letter.

Rep. Denham this week pointed out that the plan also would produce “skyrocketing water and electricity rates” for his Central Valley constituents.

“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,” the lawmaker said. “We will not allow them to take our water and destroy our way of life.”

The congressman’s two related amendments are included in the House-approved Interior, Environment, Financial Services, and General Government Appropriations Act of 2019, H.R. 6147, which is under consideration by the U.S. Senate.

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