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Director's Corner

Updates from FOR and response to Covid-19

By Eric Wesselman, Executive Director



We hope you and your loved ones are well and staying safe.

Friends of the River was born out of innovation, adaptation, and creativity. The founders of FOR had never led a river protection campaign before, but they forged ahead navigating as they went. Our ability to read and run rapids empowered our community to protect rivers as Wild and Scenic and prevent further destruction from dams over the years. We can apply the same ingenuity to the current health situation from COVID-19 as we point positive.

The FOR office is working remotely for the next few weeks to support the health of our staff and community. Our work continues to protect rivers even as we telecommute! FOR staff can be reached during this time. [Click here](#) to view the best contact information.

In accordance with public health recommendations, to contribute to the slow of transmission and in an abundance of caution for vulnerable communities, we will be cancelling or modifying FOR events for the next 2 months.

The following events are cancelled/on standby:

- **March 31** - Beyond the Pale Brewing at Yolo Brewing Company (cancelled)
- **May 13** - Point Positive Day at the Capitol and CA Museum (cancelled)
- **May 28** - River of Song in Berkeley (on standby)
- Any rafting or canoeing events (cancelled through May 25)

As the situation develops, we will send updates about FOR events being rescheduled or further postponed.

We recognize that this time can be stressful and uncertain. You can learn more about COVID-19 and the response from the [CA Department of Public Health](#). If you are impacted

from loss of work, read more about options on the [Labor and Workforce Development Agency website](#).

Look for future FOR bonus material to help keep you informed and entertained as you stay safe and sound.

River Currents

By Ron Stork, *Policy Director*

[View Full River Currents Article!](#)

Confession

I admit it, this monthly column does tend to emphasize the challenges that river protection advocates have in a state and federal world where the anti-subsidy policies of Governor Pat Brown and Presidents Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan have been forgotten by today's politicians. And that's on top of the politicians who believe that river canyons exist to be dammed.



Environmentalists who work on water issues have a few standing conference calls. Since I try to be an optimist, I chided a colleague for always bring dark news to the call. The reply was that if I wanted to remain more chipper that I should stop using the adjective "dark" and just call it "news."

Good advice. And we should just "carry on" no matter what the news. The blue and green earth needs us.

Request for forgiveness and some advice

We are now distributing "Headwaters," our hard copy newsletter a few times a year. The copy deadline was last week, so for those of you for whom we also have snail mail addresses, you are going to see some overlap.

In the big picture, that should be OK. Our email and snail mail lists don't have complete overlap, and each form of distribution has its advantages. In fact, it wouldn't be a bad idea for all of you email members to give us your postal address so you can get the print newsletters too. Just saying.

The President comes to town

Well, we can't let this River Currents go by without remarking on the President's visit to California last month. Addressing the adoring and well-screen Bakersfield crowd, he promised them a lot of water, a lot of dam, a lot of everything.

Then he signed an executive order directing the Secretaries of Commerce and the Interior to make water deliveries "more reliable and bountiful." The executive order (he called it legislation) directed the Secretaries to create more storage, capture more water, and provide more regulatory certainty for water users. Needless to say, at least some of the federal agencies snapped to attention and said "yes, sir."

Shasta Dam raise back on track

U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) Commissioner Brenda Burman accompanied the President, so it wasn't surprising that Reclamation was, is, and will be part of the action.

Funded by a new 2020 fiscal year \$134 million gift from the Congress to the Secretary of

the Interior to use as he sees fit for new dams and new storage, Interior put the Shasta Dam pre-construction team back to work. (Congress hadn't funded the project directly in the last two fiscal years).

And following the Presidential lead, it announced it was back to work with a tweet. Lovely. ...

State efforts to protect water quality just keep losing to lawless feds

It will come as no surprise that the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) is using its purported power under the Hoopa court decision to declare that state and some tribes have waived their right to impose conditions to protect water quality on new licenses for dams under FERC's jurisdiction.

The latest is Southern California Edison's Big Creek Project on the San Joaquin River. Here FERC retroactively declared the water quality certificate that had been issued in the spring of last year null and void. Shame on FERC. Shame on Edison...

Subsidizing it

There's a reason why the pace of dam-building slowed in the 1970s and 1980s. Subsidies for the water supply and power features of federal water projects ended as environmentalists and fiscal hawks joined forces. As a result, uneconomic dam proposals dropped like flies.

But the water lobby is accustomed to its subsidies, and it's been clawing its way back to the federal trough ever since. 2016 was one of their great years. They passed a "Drought" bill that started up the Reclamation dam machine with 25% or 50% federal subsidies for dam projects. ...

Wrecking the San Joaquin and Sacramento River Bay Delta, and loving it

One of the guys who got some serious face time with senior Administration officials out in California for the President's visit was the Friant Authority's Jason Phillips. Reclamation's Friant Dam takes a large majority of the San Joaquin River's flow and sends it to more than a million acres of farmland from Madera to Bakersfield. So Jason is an important man.

He's also a man with a mission and a blueprint to get there. His idea is to increase pumping from California's beleaguered Delta by a third to a half and bring those flows to his farmers with new, expanded, and (in one case) reconstructed canals. More or expanded dams and a tunnel under the Delta also play a role, as does, in the eyes of many, sacrificing north state fisheries...

Some good news?

You have to admit that FERC's Office of Dam Safety and Inspections did not look that good as its licensee the California Department of Resources experienced one crisis after another at Oroville Dam in 2017. And it got worse as the reviews uncovered the causes of the incident and the failures to take seriously legitimate warnings (including Friends of the River's) that should have been heeded.

I've tried to watch as the FERC's dam safety program adopted new rigor in its largely secret work. So I was not surprised when FERC announced that it was ordering the main dam for the Santa Clara Water Agency (now Valley Water) to be drained rather than allowed to be partially full until seismic upgrades to the dam can be made...

California green and golden

Little rain in January, no rain in February, and poor prospects in March has meant that many California landscapes never obtained their full winter green. Our spring wildflower season will be shorter, earlier, and more muted. Rivers this year are going to be mostly low-water affairs.

That said, photographers, videographers, and even pod casters should still be getting out to share the story and images of California's waterways. We are counting on you.

It goes without saying that California's water buffalos are going to be firing up their PR departments and hiring outside consultants to show reservoir bathtub rings with the message that we need more of them. ...

Click here to read the March *River Currents* article
by Ron Stork

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Thank you for supporting rivers by staying informed.
We can't wait to see you at our next event!

Sincerely,
the FOR Staff: Eric, Ron, Brittney, Toby, Kellie and Colton

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