

## **Testimony of NCWA Chairman Don Bransford**

### **Before the Joint Hearing of the Assembly Committee on Water Parks and Wildlife and the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Water Resources**

**November 19, 1999**

Thank you Chairmen Costa and Machado and members of both committees for your leadership on this important issue. My name is Don Bransford, and I am Chairman of the Board of the Northern California Water Association (NCWA). NCWA represents 68 public water agencies, companies and individual water rights holders with entitlements to the surface waters of the Sacramento Valley. NCWA members collectively irrigate over 850,000 acres of Sacramento Valley farmland, extending from the Coast Range to the Sierra Nevada foothills, and from Redding to Sacramento.

The earlier comments provided by MWD and Contra Costa Water District were encouraging and properly set the stage to discuss the possibilities for similar projects that might be pursued in the future. It should be noted, however, that the EPA/Corps of Engineers interpretation of Clean Water Act Section 404 was unique for these two projects. MWD's Eastside Reservoir was constructed on dry land; therefore, no 404 compliance was required. Contra Costa's project was developed to address water quality and availability issues. New storage projects that are developed in the context of providing new water supplies will face substantially more difficult 404 requirements.

It is clear that new offshore storage is needed in California, and we believe that a project like the one proposed at Sites, west of Maxwell, should be at the top of the list.

According to DWR's Bulletin 160-98, statewide water demand currently exceeds supplies by 1.6 million acre-feet (maf) in average water years. In drought years, the supply deficit is 5.1 maf. Aggressive statewide urban and agricultural demand management actions are expected to result in savings of 400 thousand acre-feet (af) in the next 20 years. However, approximately 2 maf of new supplies will be required by 2020 to satisfy average year demands. These supplies can only be derived from new surface and groundwater storage, desalination and recycling efforts. New surface storage provides the most reliable, assured means of developing new supplies.

The water community can debate this issue forever and spend millions of dollars a year. This will not change the fact that we will ultimately need to make a difficult choice to meet water demands in California. With new storage a necessity, the only real question is where that storage

should be located. (I should note that, with the possible exception of enlarging existing dams – like Shasta, New Bullards Bar, or Oroville – offstream storage is the only viable, environmentally acceptable solution.)

NCWA believes that the Sites Reservoir is the best offstream design alternative.

In this regard, offstream storage should be planned in conjunction with local needs, including water utilization needs and environmental needs. New growth and development should pay for the additional increment of water. The simple economics of the solution is that it is affordable. We know for example that cost estimates range between \$150-\$300/af for a large Sites project. This is affordable from almost any perspective.

While affordability is a key consideration, one must also take into account the flexibility provided by new surface storage facilities. With new offstream storage, benefits must be assessed remembering that the total is more than the sum of its parts. In our view, the key to success is to maximize the total water resources mix available to address the varied water problems that confront the state. For example, if we combine conjunctive use, direct diversion and related management options, we can enhance the relative value (water/environmental) of offstream storage beyond what could be available looking only at that solution alone.

A new reservoir at Sites is the prime example of what can be done. New offstream storage projects are essential to the realization of many state water needs and will enhance political support for related actions in the Sacramento Valley, such as voluntary water transfers and conjunctive use programs. A new offstream surface storage reservoir at Sites will create new water supplies for upstream urban, agricultural and environmental needs, as well as supplies for other needs in the state. Existing conveyance facilities on the west side of the Sacramento Valley can provide other benefits:

**Flexibility.** A new storage facility at Sites enhances flexibility for Sacramento River operations. With a new reserve of water on the west side of the valley, water districts might under various scenarios be served from this source, thereby providing greater flexibility at Lake Shasta to meet downstream environmental, urban and agricultural needs.

**Protect the environment.** In addition to the added flexibility noted above, stored water at the Sites Reservoir could be released back into valley conveyance systems to benefit Sacramento River fisheries. (No significant environmental or archeological problems are currently identified in the reservoir area.)

**Improve water supply reliability.** Depending on the configuration selected, Sites Reservoir would provide nearly 450,000 af of water deliveries annually, providing a more reliable water source for urban and agricultural uses.

**Enhance flood protection.** Sites Reservoir would also impound uncontrolled runoff from the western foothills and thereby enhance flood control flexibility associated with existing reservoirs such as Shasta Dam by freeing up additional storage in these facilities for flood control.

A new project would also provide groundwater recharge, power generation and regulation, and recreational benefits not afforded by demand management programs, water transfers or groundwater storage. While new surface storage north and south of the Delta would help fulfill area of origin commitments, storage projects would more importantly provide multiple benefits.

Although various water management practices promoted by CALFED have merit and should be pursued, these measures will not alleviate the current environmental problems in the Bay-Delta ecosystem, nor will they provide additional water supplies for California's surging population. Traditional "soft path" measures such as water transfers, conservation and conversion of farmland have varying applicability in different regions of California, and may cause severe adverse impacts in Northern California. An over-reliance on traditional methods of water conservation also ignores the hydrologic reality of the Sacramento Valley, which as acknowledged by CALFED, is unlikely to generate, through water conservation, new water for the Bay-Delta system.

It is not yet clear how increased CALFED and CVPIA environmental streamflows – much of which will originate from Sacramento River tributaries – will affect the hydrology of the valley and the economy of the valley. This water must be replaced to sustain existing rural economies and preserve the environment.

Potential impacts due to these CALFED and CVPIA actions include increased groundwater pumping, farming changes, and the adverse reallocation of water away from area of origin agriculture and toward Delta and export applications. CVPIA and CALFED environmental documents predict that water use efficiency and transfer actions may also impart potential adverse impacts on farm labor, substantial costs associated with achieving efficiency goals, and reduced flows to agricultural habitat areas.

Groundwater is of paramount importance to the Sacramento Valley. In this regard it is essential to dispute the apparent view of some that reliance on Sacramento Valley groundwater can obviate the need for new offstream surface storage. While a portion of local and statewide water needs can likely be enhanced through the prudent conjunctive management of groundwater and surface water in some areas of the Sacramento Valley, it cannot be the solution. It should be noted that groundwater levels in some west side areas of the valley were declining 30 years ago prior to the construction of CVP surface water delivery systems. Upon completion of the Tehama-Colusa and Corning Canals, groundwater levels in some wells began to recover and rose to historic maximum levels. These levels were essentially maintained through the 1970s and mid-1980s. The drought experienced in the early 1990s, coupled with the increased cost of CVP water, forced certain west side irrigators to turn to groundwater, where available, as an affordable, reliable source of supply. However, the increased reliance on groundwater has accompanied noted declines in groundwater levels in certain areas close to the CVP delivery system.

Additional reliance on groundwater – as predicted in the CVPIA PEIS – to make up for dwindling surface supplies could have significant impacts on the agricultural economy of these areas. Significant adverse impacts associated with an over reliance on groundwater noted by some west side irrigators during drought periods are the high pumping costs, well deepening, and pump relocation costs associated with lowered groundwater levels in summer months. Other adverse impacts, including groundwater quality degradation, changes in groundwater-surface water interaction, migration and upwelling of poor-quality groundwater, may occur if alternative supplies associated with offstream storage are not developed.

Finally, new surface storage provides the best assurance California can give that area of origin protections and promises will finally be fulfilled. We strongly believe that the successes enjoyed by MWD and Contra Costa can be replicated with new offstream storage in the Sacramento Valley.