

Bakersfield Californian

Editorial: Cut off water, dry up Kern; An Alameda County judge must be convinced to allow delta water to keep flowing down aqueduct

April 4, 2007

Kern County will suffer severe economic and environmental damage if a court order that threatens to shut down the California Aqueduct is not delayed.

Alameda County Superior Court Judge Frank Roesch ruled the state lacked a permit to kill chinook salmon and delta smelt as a consequence of pumping water from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta into the Aqueduct.

Roesch gave the state 60 days to obtain the permit from the Department of Fish and Game or shut down pumping. He has scheduled a hearing Friday. State Department of Water Resources officials must convince Roesch not to follow through with his threat. They also must move quickly to obtain the permit.

The entire Central Valley will lose irrigation water from the State Water Project if the pumping is halted. The State Water Project accounts for about 21 percent of all the water used in Kern County.

Numerous urban water districts in the valley and Southern California will also be at risk of losing drinking water. The project pumps \$300 billion into the state's economy annually, according to Lester Snow, director of the Department of Water Resources.

Environmental damage to habitat restoration efforts specifically the Kern Water Bank also could result if pumping is stopped, according to state officials. The Kern Water Bank stores water in wet years for use by various water districts in dry years.

Overall, Snow said he was "perplexed" by the ruling, adding, "Environmentally, it would be unacceptable to curtail all deliveries from the State Water Project. There are wetlands areas that would suffer from a loss of Delta water, and there could be overpumping of the groundwater basin."

In a teleconference with newspaper editors, including The Californian, Snow made several points he and other officials said they would present to the court in seeking to have the order modified:

- * It will be impossible to do the paperwork to obtain the permit within 60 days.
- * In effect, DWR has met the requirements for justifying a permit through a series of operating agreements it has with the Department of Fish and Game in recent years.
- * The court's order doesn't take into account economic damage that its ruling would have.
- * The ruling fails to take into account numerous environmental initiatives that have been undertaken in recent years, yielding benefits that offset any adverse circumstances a missing take permit might have.

Those are compelling arguments. The flow of water from the delta must continue. #