



Opportunities Wasted

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California received a much needed gift over the holiday season, a torrent of rain and snow to start off the winter. The positive results were clear when the first snow survey of the season, on January 2, found the Sierra snowpack at 34 percent above average for the date.

While it seemed to be a good sign at the time, the early deluge of precipitation also stood to highlight all that is wrong in California's water system. While these storms were filling the

state's rivers and streams, limitations under the Endangered Species Act to protect delta smelt resulted in water supply losses of over 371,000 acre feet as of January 8, which is enough water to supply 2.3 million people for a full year.

These same restrictions have been held by a federal court to be legally invalid after scientists for the federal fishery agencies were unable to show an environmental benefit for stifling water exports to this extent, yet the restrictions still remain in place while regulators prepare new rules. With no demonstrable environmental benefit, water was simply lost to the ocean instead of being put to beneficial use by urban and agricultural users throughout the state.

Now, as California's weather has seemed to shift back to a dry pattern, water managers would love

to have that excess water back. Recent projections by the National Weather Service are forecasting little precipitation in the coming weeks and the state may have squandered its best opportunity to capture water when the rivers and streams were running high in December and early January.



Therein lies the problem that water managers struggle with each year. When a deluge of water is added to the system by Mother Nature, that water cannot be stored for drier times because of

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questionable pumping restrictions imposed to protect fish species. As most climate experts warn, warmer wet storms will likely become the norm in the coming years and the natural water storage in the Sierra snowpack will melt off earlier in the year, so capturing and storing water when it is in the system will continue to grow in importance.

A water system that can take advantage of winter precipitation, without affecting endangered fish populations, **could have delivered an extra 371,000 acre feet of water to farms, residents and businesses in one month!** This is exactly why an alternate conveyance system, as proposed under the Bay Delta Conservation Plan (BDCP), is vital for the state's future.



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A Project of the Coalition for a Sustainable Delta