



SWING AND A MISS

October is known for two things: the start of a new water year and playoff baseball. Unfortunately, after six consecutive years of historic drought, the State Water Resources Control Board hasn't exactly turned in a World Series worthy performance.

In the last several weeks, the State Board has released not one, but two proposals that would be a game changer for California water users. Their proposed revisions of the "Bay-Delta Water Quality Control Plan" would dramatically cut already scarce supplies of water for urban and agricultural users up and down the state. The State Board has tried this game plan before. Years of reducing exports and increasing flows without addressing other stressors on the Delta ecosystem has done nothing for the declining native species while allowing non-native populations to flourish.

Taken together, the controversial, unprecedented plans to send more water down the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers to the ocean will have significant financial ramifications for cities and rural areas from Redding to San Diego – economies that have already suffered as a result of the State Board's ineffective flow management.

While flows are an important factor in improving endangered fish populations, more flow isn't necessarily the answer. According to an October 2016 Public Policy Institute of California report, "...a drop of water may have very different environmental benefits depending on where it is used. In some places, a little water—applied in the right place at the right time—can go a long way toward protecting species."

In the 2014-2015 water year alone, environmental water restrictions dictated more than 1 million acre feet be flushed out to sea for the benefit of endangered fish populations. This water comes at the expense of millions of the state's residents, costing consumers, businesses and farms hundreds of millions of dollars and resulting in tens of thousands of job losses.

Instead of swinging for the fences with a tired and ineffective game plan, the Water Board needs to implement a suite of actions including strategically timed flows, predation control, addressing unscreened diversions, and habitat restoration.

None of these actions are a home run on their own, but the State Board should consider playing a little small ball to improve endangered fish populations and ecosystems rather than trying to win the game with one swing. Past actions to increase flows have not resulted in increased fish populations, and are unlikely to do so now. Sometimes swinging for the fences just doesn't work.

