

FRESNO BEE – Sunday Local Section July 13, 2008



Bill McEwen **Save money on water storage with Tulare Lake**

Dear Gov. Schwarzenegger:

I'm sure your water advisers mean well, but I don't think they're telling you all you need to know about the San Joaquin Valley.

One of your big goals is to increase water storage south of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. Guess what? You don't have to put \$5 billion into a dam at Temperance Flat.

Not when you have a natural terminal lake between the California Aqueduct and the Friant-Kern Canal. A natural lake, I might add, that is bone dry and begging for water because of dams on the San Joaquin and Kings rivers.

I'm talking about historic Tulare Lake, which was drained and conquered by men like J.G. Boswell and Clarence Salyer -- visionaries who foresaw the value of marrying water, land and cotton.

But times have changed and we must recognize that Mother Nature knows best. Tulare Lake -- once the largest freshwater ecosystem west of the Mississippi River -- can play a big role in fixing our state's water-supply system.

Consider this: using just 10% of the old lake bed would yield twice as much water storage as the dam proposed for Temperance Flat above Millerton Lake. This is reason alone to bring back Tulare Lake, but there are others.

Know what a pain in the backside the environmentalists can be? Even if you find the money to build Temperance Flat, the greenies will use the courts to block its construction for years, if not decades.

On the other hand, environmentalists will embrace Tulare Lake because it'll recharge the ground-water supply and provide new habitat for sensitive critters. Taxpayers will love Tulare Lake, too. Have you checked the price of aggregate lately? The cost of Temperance Flat goes up daily.

I know you're paying attention to San Joaquin River restoration plans and calls by farmers to recirculate water instead of letting it flow to the Pacific Ocean.

Guess what? Tulare Lake could help make a U-turn of irrigation water possible. Here's the plan: water from the northbound San Joaquin is stopped short of the Delta and pumped south through the California Aqueduct. Water then is shipped to east-side farmers through Tulare Lake via new connections that would link the aqueduct and Friant-Kern Canal.

Now, I can't vouch for this plan personally. But folks at Revive the San Joaquin -- a Fresno-based nonprofit that believes farmers and environmentalists should work hand in hand -- say it has potential.

By now, you're thinking, "What isn't this crazy newspaper guy telling me?"

Well, there's an obstacle.

Even though some of the old Tulare Lake bed has been abused and isn't good for farming anymore, a lot of it is still productive -- and the J.G. Boswell Co. won't want it under 10 feet of water. But something can be worked out, especially since the San Joaquin and Kings only flood once every 10 years or so.

And if you have your heart set on doing something at Millerton Lake, raise the old dam 25 feet. This will provide flood control and storage at bargain prices compared with building Temperance Flat.

Governor: California needs Tulare Lake. You can help make it happen.

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