

Robert Pyke, Consulting Engineer

July 28, 2013

Nancy Vogel
Department of Water Resources,
1416 Ninth Street,
Sacramento CA 95814

Water Deliveries under the BDCP

Dear Nancy,

As usual, your latest post on the so-called BDCP Blog is nicely written, but unfortunately much of your argument is fallacious.

In particular, it is a fallacy that the BDCP is big gulp / little sip plan. To be sure more water would be taken in wet years and less in dry years because there is more water in wet years, but the BDCP is essentially “run-of-the river”. It includes no storage, and no ability to take a really big gulp in really wet years. And, while total exports in dry years will be less than at present, exports in the summer months in those years will be even greater than at present. Currently exports from the South Delta are exceeding the outflow from the Delta into the Bay. Because the bypass flow requirements limit exports at other times of the year, the BDCP will “suck the Sacramento River dry” in summer to the detriment of Delta water quality.

But there are two even more important points raised by your blog that may not be apparent on first reading. The first is that the claimed exports in the wet years are bogus because there is nowhere to put the water in wet to very wet years. For 100 years the pattern of weather in California is to have bunches of wet years separated by normal years and bunches of dry years, usually referred to as droughts. While in the first wet year after a dry spell the calculated BDCP exports might be realized because existing South of Delta storage will be drawn down and the fields will be parched, in subsequent wet years the calculated BDCP exports cannot be realized because there will be nowhere to put the water. The reservoirs will be full and the fields will be soaked. In the extreme, Tulare Lake will become a lake again. This effect can be seen in the historic record. If you look in particular at exports in 1983 and 1998, the second years of an El Nino event, you will see that they are lower than normal, not greater than normal. It is in years like these that the spurious BDCP water balance calculations indicate exports of up to 8 million acre-feet, whereas the likely exports might be something less than 4 million acre-feet. Not only does this mean that the good Professor Sunding's

calculations of economic benefits are in error, it also means that the farmers who are being told that “water deliveries stay at roughly the same level into the future under the BDCP” are being conned. That will not be true even on average.

Which brings me to my second point. It is generally not helpful to put lipstick on a pig because it obscures the true worth of the pig and does not allow the market to reach rational decisions. Propaganda like the BDCP blog aggravates the problem rather than solving it because the spin obscures the facts. But I guess that is what politicians and bureaucrats do. As David Zetland said several years ago in his paper *A Broken Hub Will Not Wheel* when discussing the reasons for the inordinate time that it is now taking to solve California water management issues, “it’s not just that the problems are complex, but also because resolution would not benefit politicians and bureaucrats.” One might also add the general managers of the big water districts to the list of people who benefit from on-going water wars. Note that the \$250 million or whatever it is that has been flushed down the drain by the BDCP process does not come out of their rather large salaries, it comes from the water users who have been misled time and time again by their leaders. As more than one observer has noted, the water wars are more about power than they are about water.

So, if you would like to be part of the solution rather than part of the problem, why don’t you start by allowing comments on the BDCP blog, or by publishing this letter on the blog, as a step towards having a genuine discussion of the issues.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bob". The letters are cursive and somewhat stylized.

Robert Pyke Ph.D., G.E.