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Other views: The reality behind fantasy of restoring Hetch Hetchy

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The restoration of the Hetch Hetchy Valley in Yosemite National Park has been discussed time and time again over the years. The latest effort has spawned a number of news stories and editorials supporting the undertaking. While the restoration effort may be a noble cause to some, it would not come without consequences and impacts to the entire state of California.

We are in the water and power business, and as such, live in the here and now. Our energies are focused on providing essential supplies of water and electricity to an ever growing region of California. It is a formidable and challenging task.

Consequently, we don't have much time to contemplate the wisdom or merits of removing a reservoir providing drinking water to 2.4 million Bay Area residents in hopes that the long submerged portion of a valley will some day be as spectacular as the one down the road.

However, we do feel compelled to correct some of the inaccuracies that invariably are being repeated in news stories and editorials on this issue. Let's set the record straight:

- * Hetch Hetchy Reservoir provides no water benefits to the districts.
- * San Francisco does not "divert" water from Hetch Hetchy to the districts. San Francisco must respect the districts' senior water rights on the Tuolumne River and allow the required stream flow to reach Don Pedro Reservoir.
- * San Francisco does not own any water or storage rights in Don Pedro Reservoir.
- * There is no surplus storage or water available in Don Pedro Reservoir.
- * Don Pedro Reservoir provides adequate flood control protection for the Tuolumne watershed. Its spillway gates have been opened only once in 33 years.
- * As far as we know, the UC Davis "study" is little more than a master's thesis that contains fundamental errors that call into question the validity of the entire work.
- * The CALVIN model relied upon is overly simplistic and based upon flawed assumptions.

It is important to realize that any change to Hetch Hetchy impacts the entire river system.

The Tuolumne River is a complex, integrated water system that was developed over the course of 100 years of conflict and cooperation. The system must be operated in a coordinated fashion. Environmental gains in one area may be offset by losses in another area.

Tearing down any dam in California is tantamount to closing down an interstate highway, totally removing the pavement and not replacing it - at a time when transportation needs are increasing. If society values are such that the restoration of Hetch Hetchy is desirable, at any cost, then equivalent or greater surface water storage should be built, in place and operational, before any such removal project is undertaken.

Rather than tearing down major pieces of California's water infrastructure, we should work together to meet the state's growing water needs. It is unfortunate that too often Californians react emotionally to water issues. So, think about it. How long can you live without water?

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