Statement for September 29, 2015

Restore the Delta

Barbara Barrigan-Parrilla

It was reported last week in the San Jose Mercury News and Sacramento Bee that the Metropolitan Water District is considering the purchase of four Delta islands presently part of the Delta Wetlands project. Two of those islands are now in the direct path for the Delta tunnels project. Some critics of the Restore the Delta campaign claim we should move along, Metropolitan Water District is simply securing some additional water supply.

However, a July 28th presentation by the Metropolitan Water District Committee on the Bay-Delta shows that what is reported as water for export with the tunnels is less than what Metropolitan Water District anticipates receiving in wet, dry, and critically dry years like this one via the tunnels. You can find a PDF of this presentation at the restore the delta website, under the Frequently Asked Question page, as it no longer seems to be posted at the MWD website.

Slide 20 of their presentation shows that in a critical year like this one, MWD anticipates receiving 200,000 acre feet of additional water. Their analysis on slide 20 stands in contrast to the CA Water Fix analysis on slide 18 which shows the lesser amounts of water available for export.

This leads us to ask several questions. How does Metropolitan Water District anticipate acquiring this extra supply? Will they work to weaken ESA protections as they have been attempting this year through lobbying in Washington D.C.? Or will they acquire supply by buying up land and water supplies from Delta farms and then apply for special permission to bypass riparian water right limitations in order to transfer that water south -- in other words are they working to piecemeal an additional apropriation of water to fill the tunnels? Is this their long term goal, year after year, decade after decade, to continue exporting every last drop of fresh water flows from a diminishing supply at the expense of the rest of California?

This repackaging of the Delta tunnels will waste up to $60 billion dollars without creating any new water, won't help desperate communities during the drought, or fund innovative water conservation, stormwater capture, or water recycling projects that cities are eager to build for resilience in a changing climate.

Californians now face a huge decision. Should we commit $60 (after bond repayment and operation costs are considered) to construct twin 40 foot-wide, 35 mile-long, tunnels to export what water is left for almonds for export and speculative development – in the year 2031? Or are we going to protect the most magnificent and important estuary on the west coast of the Americas?

Governor Brown has inherited a legacy project from his father that was created on flawed logic – an overextended water supply, even back in the 1960s. With climate change, snowpack will continue to diminish in the Sacramento River watershed and more rain will fall at the coast. Instead of continuing to cling stubbornly to this flawed family legacy, Governor Brown needs to do the right thing for the future of the state he loves. He needs to drop the tunnels project once and for all, and use his office to create a Marshall plan for water sustainability for all Californians, not just mega growers in Westlands and the Kern County Water District, and certainly not for the Metropolitan Water District.