State Water Project is the wrong solution for the Ojai Valley

By Carolee Krieger

A resident of Santa Barbara County, I know from pain and suffering the consequences of a failed experiment called and unlivable. Don’t make the same mistake we did.

In three essays, I’ll share what every regional water district should consider when developing solutions that are long-term and secure a water future for their community and explain why the State Water Project is not the right path toward that goal. I’ll also present real-world data on how and we can achieve sustainable and equitable water policy for all of California.

LEGACY PROJECT

We are currently working with the Ventura County Water District, Santa Barbara County Water District, and some other entities to construct a pipeline to hook up to the State Water Project through the Los Angeles River Metropolitan Water District. This will be expensive and will not guarantee Ojai any new water as explained below.

PART I: Paper water

Not reliable

In 1991, when Santa Barbara voted to contract with the State Water Project (SWP), I found out we were for 97 percent per-reliable. However, when we needed state water in times of drought, we only secured only a re-13 percent of our contract allocation. For example, in 2014 all contractors were told that Santa Barbara was obligated to take water from SWP that was not available to supply the city of Ojai in 1998, our four South Coast water districts have received an average of 28 percent delivery.

Outrageously expensive

We were told our total cost of participating in the SWP would be $270 million. Santa Barbara ratepayers will have in 3 years of state water that is not available to us. We pay these bond costs whether or not you receive any wa-ter. In the past, states have been forced to purchase water associated with delivery are passed on to the ratepayers. Worse still, if Ojai approves a contract with the SWP, you’ll be obligated to pay for water that you do not want to pay for water because it is not available to the city through the Delta.

The Ojai Valley Green Coalition (C-WIN), a citizens group I founded in the 1990s, advised Ojai and its communities, for doing the void left by Ojai Community to fund the cost of paper water. The city of Ojai is currently considering. If passed, the new amendments will be paid for with the profits going to the seller.

Mismanaged water: Agriculture vs. urban

If you’re not sure about the needs of all Californians and the environment if it’s managed equitably. Mismanagement of public water is undermining the economic stability and well-being of California’s communities and en-
vironment. Paper water enables developers to build without real water and large agricultural users to sell so-called “excess water” to the ratepayers who have already paid for it. More than 80 percent of developed water in the state is used by agriculture. The subsidized low cost of agricultural water gives growers little or no incentive to use water effi-
ciently. The rule is “use it or lose it,” for water is not used, the right to it is threatened.

Unfortunately, it’s legal to sell unused allocations and profit from the sale. These transactions are known as “water banking.” It’s a planned process where water that is cur-
curred between farms in the same district for non-profit. More and more, “excess” agricultural water is being sold back to the urban water districts that never got the allocations they paid for— with the profits going to the sellers.

A few weeks ago, when Joaquin Valley are to be able to exert more control over the water being di-
verted from the California Delta and get California ratepayers to our four South Coast water districts.

In Part 2, I’ll outline some of these solutions and talk about what’s working in Santa Barbara. Since water is a public trust resource, we will examine the role of the Public Trust Doctrine in solving the paper water problem. The Doctrine successfully saved Mono Lake and guided sound water policy in Idaho and Colorado. In Part 3, I’ll share the road map to enacting into law the sustainable and equitable water policies California needs for a secure future water.

—Longtime Santa Barbara resident Carolee Krieger leads C-WIN’s efforts to design and implement collaborative and lasting solutions for California’s fresh water resources. Santa Barbara 1st District Supervisor Naomi Newton named Krieger Woman of the Year in 1997. She has been involved in Mother Jones, Bloomberg, and an Emmy-nominated PBS broadcast about the impact of dams on water supply.

Ecycle event a huge success

DEBORAH PENDREY, Ojai

You thank you, Ojai Valley communities, thank you for my first real. And we are very proud to announce that, with the help of the City of Ojai and our loyal sponsors, we were able to host our 11th eCycle event. Ojai Green Coalition had its inception in 1998, and this year we are looking back at a year of success and growth.

We began planning for the event back in August, and we are very excited to share how this year’s event was a huge success. We had over 115 volunteers and 120 participants, and we collected over 100,000 pounds of recyclable materials. We were able to extend our reach by partnering with local businesses and organizations, and we also received significant support from the local community.

The event was well-attended, with many people interested in learning about e-recycling and sustainable practices. We had a variety of workshops and activities, including a recycling challenge and a resource fair, which provided valuable information to participants.

We are looking forward to next year’s event and are already making plans to improve and expand our offerings. We are grateful to everyone who helped make this year’s event a success and we look forward to continuing our efforts to promote e-recycling and sustainability in the Ojai Valley.

Maven’s Notebook

Further Reading

C-WIN’s Delta Quantification study: www.c-win.org/s/CWIN-DeltaQuantification-Summary.pdf

C-WIN’s Central Valley Paper Water Summary: www.c-win.org/s/CWIN-CentralValleyQuantification-Summary.pdf

UC Davis Quantification study: www.c-win.org/UCDC-Davis-2014-Grantham-Water-Qntfication.pdf

C-WIN’s Santa Barbara Report: www.c-win.org/the-santa-barbara-report

Resources

C-WIN with our partners: www.c-win.org

Water Education Foundation: www.watereducation.org

Voices Your Concerns: Ventura County District 1, Ojai Valley Municipal Advisory Council

District office phone: 805-547-2703

Supervisor Steve Bennett: steve.bennett@ventura.ca.gov

Chief of Staff Candy Camarillo: candy.camarillo@ventura.ca.gov

Assistant Administrative Steve Offeman: cindy.offeman@ventura.ca.gov

City of Ventura

State Water Interconnection Project Engineer Betsy Cooper: bcooper@cityofventura.ca.gov

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Ojai can learn from Santa Barbara’s mistakes with state water

By Carolee Krieger

PART 2: Regional solutions, statewide reform

As a long-term resident of California concerned with the availability of water for all Californians, I’m sharing what I’ve learned from the Ojai Valley Water Agency (OVWA) State Water Project before considering a contract with this SWP 2.5 times a three-part series. In Part 1, described how California’s freshwater is managed via something known as “paper water” and how the SWP uses it to extract frequently fees from regional water suppliers. (For example, 30% of all contracts (raterpayers like you and me) without supplying the water allocated to them in their contracts.

Led to believe that we would receive 97% of our allocated cost of $270 million, the agency voted to become an SWP contractor in 1991. Since then, we’ve allocated only 28% of our allocation for a cost to ratepayers of $1.7 billion. The Ojai Valley would find itself in the same situation should it become an SWP contractor. Ojai will lose local control over costs as the Department of Water Resources expands its infrastructure projects, the cost of which are overcharged.

The Department of Water Resources and the SWP have allocated 5.5 times the amount of water known to exist in the California Delta watershed. This is what the California Court of Appeal has termed “paper water” – water that doesn’t exist. The paper water is supposed to be there and it would let you believe.

There are several for the SWP comes from the California Delta watershed. The 2009 Delta Reform Act requires Southern California Water to purchase water from the Delta. This current Twin Tunnels has been stuck in the courts and has cost the agency millions and millions of dollars.

On paper, the State Water Project may look like a good agreement with a diversified water security plan for the Ojai Valley, except that it’s literally paper — not water. Very expensive paper.

Regional solutions

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PART 3: The Public Trust

Currently, mismanagement of public water is far more dangerous than the drought to the economic stability and well-being of the communities and environment. As the Ojai Valley community considers mismanagement of public water, the loss of fresh water, I’d like to share the relevant experiences of my county of Santa Barbara — with the hope that Ojai residents may learn from our mistakes and apply it to our communities and environment.

This is the third of three essays that I submitted to the State Water Project, why Ojai should reject it, what realistic solutions should be considered, and the benefits to the public for all actors to achieve.

Part 2 outlined a carefully considered list of viable alternative sources of fresh water, many of which we had already been successfully implemented in Santa Barbara County and elsewhere.

In Part 3, I’ll talk about how the state of California can end the destruction of its public water resources. All of the water in the State Water Project system comes from the California Delta. Without quantification of the water in the Delta and an analysis of the impacts of proposed diversion scenarios, all of these participants in State Water Resources Control Board hearings (Twin Tunnels, Oroville dam repair, etc.). These costs are determinable by the Department of Water Resources and passed on to the state and the people, and the SWP will not guarantee Ojai any new water, and as I have outlined in Part 1, the Delta is not even capable of accomplishing its current form.

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• Implementation of the 2009 Delta Reform Act standards, regulations, and enforcement, all of which require the SWP to prepare an Environmental Impact Report on the project before it can proceed. Ventura County taxpayers are paying $1.7 billion for state water instead of the $278 million it would cost to build only 28 percent of our allocation, and how the state has over-allocated fresh water by a factor of 5.5 (the practice of “paper water”), instead, and the path to the secure, equitable and sustainable future is: “No water … can be taken from a stream, lake or other natural resource without a careful assessment of the harm that might have been caused.”

• A Public Trust assessment and analysis of export scenarios

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