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OP-ED

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Mountain Counties Water Resources Association (MCWRA) advocates for the water interests of its members in the Sierra Nevada mountain communities. We have significant concerns about Senate Bill 1199, "Wild and scenic rivers: Mokelumne River."

SB 1199, authored by Oakland Senator Loni Hancock, designates almost 37 miles of the Mokelumne River in Calaveras and Amador counties as a "wild and scenic river" in the California Wild and Scenic Rivers System. This section of the Mokelumne is in Senator Tom Berryhill's district.

The bill effectively removes options for Amador County to firm-up its existing water supplies to serve its current residents in an extended drought and provide for the future water needs of the County, and effectively removes options for Calaveras County to use 90 percent of the water reserved for it under State water right applications respecting the Mokelumne River and pursuant to a 1958 agreement with East Bay Municipal Utility District.

The Mokelumne River watershed serves multiple beneficiaries, both upstream and into the Central Valley and the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

MCWRA opposes SB 1199 because it would set a precedent and could derail the State's long-term water supply planning. It could create serious implications for regional water storage development and water diversions not only on the Mokelumne River system, but also on other major rivers in the watersheds of the Sierra Nevada, which provide 60-70 percent of California's water supply.

In the Mountain Counties Overlay Area of the California Water Plan, 383 river miles are designated Wild and Scenic:

- 78 miles of the North and Middle forks of the Feather River above Lake Oroville (federal)
- 39 miles of the South Yuba River above Englebright Lake (State)
- 38 miles of the North Fork American River east of Colfax (federal and State)
- 23 miles of the lower American River below Nimbus Dam (federal and State)
- 83 miles of the Tuolumne River above Don Pedro Reservoir (federal)
- 122 miles of the Merced River and its South Fork above Lake McClure (federal)

SB 1199 would add another 36.6 miles:

- 20 miles wild-9 recreational on the North Fork

- 3 miles scenic, 4.6 recreational on main stem

The designation of the main stem will terminate at the upper extent of the Pardee Reservoir flood surcharge pool.

Consideration of additional wild and scenic designations is more appropriate for the ongoing state-funded collaborative use process involving many Mokelumne River stakeholders, and should not be used to short-circuit that process for the benefit of just one of those stakeholders. The legislature's job is to help ensure future water supply reliability for all of California. Now is not the time to take water storage options off the table for California. This is not a partisan issue, but affects all Californians.



[Wild and Scenic is dedicated environmental water use in the area for in-stream flows required below most major dams and diversions by State Water Resources Control Board licenses, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) licenses, and agreements with other agencies and Wild and Scenic River designations.]