

# The Sacramento/San Joaquin River Delta: System Stressors

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Auburn, CA October 27, 2017



# Disclaimers

- I am not speaking for the SWRCB or the DSC
- I am not presenting State policy
- I am expressing personal observations and opinions, except where specifically referenced to published materials



# Role of the Delta Watermaster

- The Office of the Delta Watermaster was created as part of the Delta Reform Act of 2009
- The Watermaster is an independent officer of the State
- Appointed to a four-year term by the State Water Resources Control Board (Water Board)
- Reports jointly to the Water Board and the Delta Stewardship Council
- The Watermaster is responsible for:
  - Administration of water rights in the Delta
  - Assisting with realization of legislative mandates (co-equal goals)
  - Coordinating implementation activities of many agencies
  - Studying and advising on policy and practice in the Delta



# Overview of Presentation

- **The Delta: Our Shared “Wicked” Problem**
- **Areas of Deep Disagreement**
- **Areas of Broad Agreement**
- **Barriers to Progress**
- **Observations (not Conclusions)**





# The Delta: Our Shared Problem

- Hub of a complex, integrated water system
- A host of unintended casualties of well-intentioned policies:
  - Reclamation
  - Watershed Development
  - Flood Control
  - Exports
- The Delta is so irretrievably altered that restoration is not possible



# Stress on the Delta

- Channelization
- Habitat loss
- Levee condition
- Land subsidence
- Tributary depletions
- Project exports
- Invasives
- Pollution
- Politics





# Areas of Disagreement

- Who is at fault?
- Which promise(s) should be broken?
- What will “fix” the problems?
- How should costs be allocated?
  - In terms of money, water, or policy trade-offs
- Who decides?
- What if I don't get what I want?



# Areas of Broad Agreement



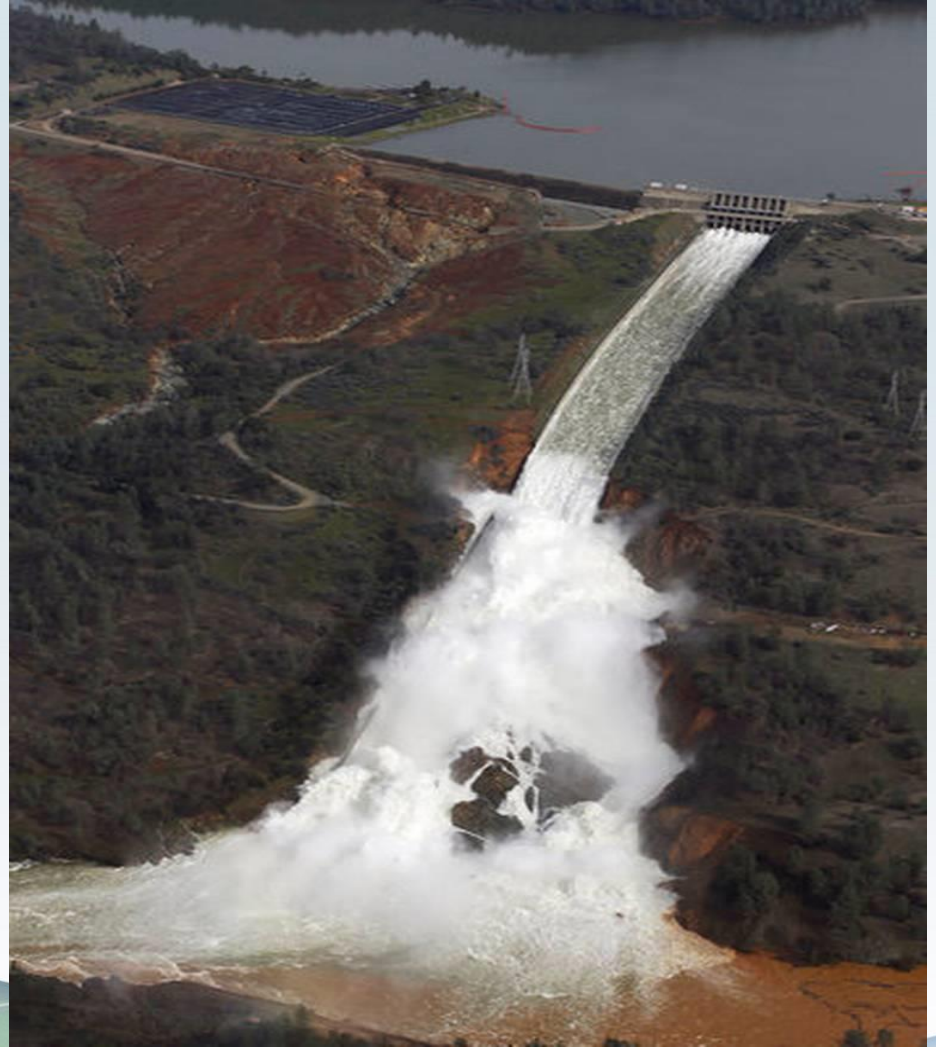
- **We're all in this together**
  - **The whole watershed is involved**
  - **No one has secure water rights unless the ecosystem improves**
  - **Climate change impacts everything and all of us**
  - **We love California**





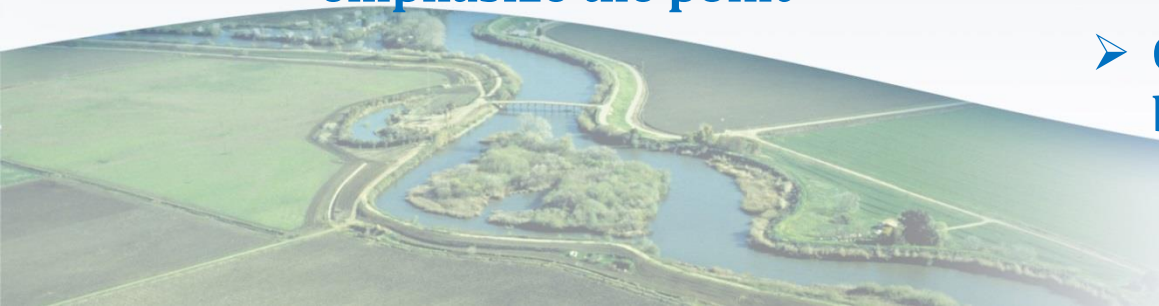
# Areas of Broad Agreement

- **Infrastructure is old and vulnerable**
  - **Maintenance is cheaper than replacement**
  - **Financing of either is a challenge under budget and legal constraints**



# Areas of Broad Agreement

- **The Headwaters demand attention**
  - Water supply and ecosystem are at risk
  - Consistency among MCWRA's Policy Principles (2014), ACWA's Resiliency Framework (2015) and the Governor's Water Action Plan (2016)
  - Catastrophic wild fires continue to tragically emphasize the point
- **We have reached consensus to inform action (“no regrets”)**
  - Fire suppression approach needs updating
  - Biomass thinning
  - Erosion management
  - Stream and meadow restoration
  - Infrastructure renewal
  - Contribution by external beneficiaries



# With all this agreement, why do we remain paralyzed?

Hint: Democracies respond to crises, not problems





# Current Paralysis

- Not only because we face complex problems along with financial and political constraints
- But also because:
  - Tribalism trumps community
  - We negotiate from positions instead of interests
  - Our resource allocation system is inadequate to demands
  - “Detrimental reliance” threatens equity
  - There is serious asymmetry between cost and benefit
  - Credibility has been blown on situational responses



**So...how can we “bend the curve” toward a sustainable watershed?**

**Hint: When you’re in a hole,  
stop digging!**



# Governmental Consistency

- **Build on the Delta Reform Act**
  - Embrace the Co-equal Goals (including Delta protection)
  - Refine the Delta Plan
  - Make practical use of the Delta Plan Interagency Implementation Committee
  - Make agency actions “consistent”
  - Empower local/regional experiments (with “backstop”)
- **Step Back to View the Forest**
  - Every action must consider the entire watershed
  - Contradictory regulations should be “called out”
  - Avoid the “absolutes” in favor of “perceptible progress”
  - Embrace reconciliation (“Renewal”)





# Regional Autonomy Tempered with Coordination

- The SGMA Formula: regional control within a sustainable framework backstopped by the State
- Avoid making “perfect” the enemy of “good”
- Promote self-sufficiency wherever possible
- Place local and regional priorities in a watershed context to build support
- Temper the tactics of your warriors because “winning” could be a chimera
  - Area of Origin protection ain’t what it used to be
  - The California economy has become addicted to exports



# Integrated Science

- Eschew “combat science” based on an enlightened cost/credibility analysis
- Build on the 1997 Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project (SNEP) Report (integrate with other reports)
- Contribute to the emerging collaborative science models:
  - One Delta/One Science (IEP, DSP, CSAMP)
  - Science Action Agenda
  - Bi-annual science conferences (DSC and SFEP)
  - Modeling “collaboratory”
- Embrace “adaptive management” where feasible
  - Model, Hypothesize, Experiment, Monitor, Report & Evaluate



Remember the Wisdom of The Rolling Stones:

**YOU CAN'T ALWAYS GET  
WHAT YOU WANT/  
BUT, IF YOU TRY REAL HARD,  
YOU JUST MIGHT GET WHAT  
YOU NEED.**





