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THE RESOURCES AGENCY OF CALIFORNIA

SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA

DEC 12 1978

Mr. Michael Blumenfeld
Deputy Under Secretary
Department of the Army
Washington, D. C. 20310

Dear Mr. Blumenfeld:

This is in response to your November 16 letter requesting the State position on the proposed clearing program for New Melones Reservoir.

The State's position on New Melones is that the Federal Government must comply with provisions of State Board Decision 1422, which includes submission of a reservoir operations plan prior to filling of the reservoir.

I would note that much of the Corps' justification for clearing has been based on the need for advance preparation for flatwater recreation uses of the reservoir, including such activities as motorboating and water skiing. California already has a surplus of such flatwater recreation opportunities. In a time of energy shortage, the State would prefer to encourage river and reservoir uses based on rafting, canoeing, kayaking, sailboating, and fishing. These ends would be better promoted by leaving trees and brush in the canyon for fish habitat.

In addition to these specific comments, I would like to suggest there is need for a new philosophical base which can guide us in future decisions affecting the allocation and use of limited resources such as the Stanislaus River.

The conflicts raised by the issues involved in the New Melones stem from the demand for unrestricted export of water for commercial use by special interests, and the often conflicting need to preserve and manage resources and natural systems for the use and enjoyment of a broader part of present and future populations.

This conflict is not unique to the New Melones project and the Stanislaus River or even to other dams and rivers. It exists in many other areas of our State and nation today, frequently on issues in which the Army Corps of Engineers plays a central role.

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One such example is the unrestrained demand for conversion of limited natural resources in pressures for new marinas and small craft harbors in sensitive areas along the California coast. This conflict is most intense at such locations as Moss Landing in Monterey County where marina expansion and associated development would entail degradation or destruction of one of the few remaining estuaries of any size in California still retaining significant historical, environmental, and esthetic values.

A similar and equally important conflict exists in Orange County, in Southern California, where development interests and boaters would like to see portions of the Bolsa Chica area dredged for a marina or filled for related residential and business development. Bolsa Chica is the largest remaining unprotected coastal wetland in California south of Point Conception, and is of critical importance for migratory bird populations.

Such problems are, of course, not unique to issues involving the Corps. We are similarly confronted with conflict, for example, in the plans of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power to export additional water from the Mono Lake Basin. If carried out as proposed, such plans would lead to degradation of Mono Lake and its remarkable aquatic, wildlife, recreational and esthetic resources.

Each of these conflicts is an example of the "tragedy of the commons" ---in which overall resource values are ultimately destroyed by small encroachments, each perhaps insignificant in itself, that cumulatively lead to destruction of the very values the users sought to enjoy.

In some of these issues, conservation offers an important but too-often unappreciated or misunderstood alternative to development or additional use of a limited resource. The effectiveness of conservation as an alternative to new water storage and transport was graphically demonstrated by voluntary citizen actions during the recent drought. It would be tragic if that lesson were to be put aside just because we have had the good fortune in the past year to receive adequate rainfall, and to find our reservoirs in good shape again.

In dealing with such problems as New Melones, society and its resource managers must learn to choose between levels of use and preservation of unique, historical, precious, and limited resources.

While present-day sociologists and historians may tend to regard technological feats as the most important achievements of 20th century America, I have no doubt that future historians, benefitting from a perspective denied contemporary observers, will regard our commitment to preservation of our resources and environmental values as the most important accomplishment of our era. Acceptance of a conservation ethic may well be ranked as an accomplishment equally important to the quality of life and man's long-term survival as sending a man to the moon.

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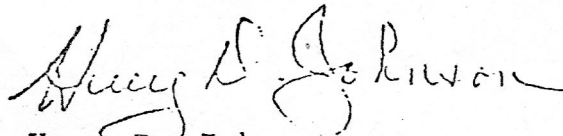
In this era of environmental awareness and growing need to manage resources on the basis of total public needs rather than narrow special interest benefits, I suggest that conservation be viewed as a resource management strategy equal in importance to that of building new projects.

Thus in conclusion, as we proceed on the New Melones issue, I would respectfully solicit the cooperation of the Department of the Army and other concerned federal departments in preserving existing natural and recreational values of the Stanislaus River to the maximum extent feasible. The State Board's Decision 1422 would, of course result in some inundation of existing whitewater stretches of the river. In formulating proposed operating plans, however, federal agencies have an opportunity to recognize the increasingly scarce values offered by this river and its canyon, and to act voluntarily to provide maximum, long-term protection to the Stanislaus from Parrott's Ferry upstream.

Thank you for the opportunity to set forth the State's position on this matter. We hope the Corps will address our specific concerns in the near future.

I would look forward to discussing with you or members of your staff the concepts I have outlined above.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Huey D. Johnson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Huey" being more prominent.

Huey D. Johnson
Secretary for Resources

cc: Honorable Edmund G. Brown, Jr.
Honorable Cecil D. Andrus
General Norman Delbridge