

Environmentality

Hope remains for Stanislaus

.....bi-weekly Environmental Outreach column

"In the broader picture of the New Melones Project, things are looking up again While we have lost the important skirmish at Camp Nine, we are closer to winning the war than we ever have been since Proposition 17."

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As Friends of the River and other groups continue to fight to save the Stanislaus, a major disadvantage is the public impression that the fight has already been lost. This column will outline some of the new efforts to save the river, and show that the Stanislaus can still be saved from the grandiose plans of the Army Corps of Engineers.

The current strategy of F.O.R. is to prevent the *filling* of New Melones Dam. This is a departure from the stand taken during Proposition 17, which was to prevent the *construction* of the dam. The State of California has already decided not to fill the dam unless there is a need for the water. Some federal studies have shown that there will not be a need for the water until well after the turn of the century. However, as it stands now, California does not have the power to say whether or not the dam will be filled, and that is the problem.

The Brown Administration is currently taking the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to the U.S. Supreme Court. The state is suing for the right to decide whether the dam will be filled, rather than having the BLM decide. But even if the state loses the case, the interior department is planning to raise the issue with President Carter, presenting him with a plan to fill the reservoir only when necessary.

Just how much support from high places is available to support the river was shown by the recent effort to stop construction at Camp 9. State Secretary of Resources Claire Dedrick, Governor Jerry Brown and Secretary of the Interior Cecil Andrus all played direct roles in trying to stop the Corps. At one point, the Secretary of Defense did halt the project, but lobbying by the Corps managed to change that decision.

As long as the dam can officially be filled as soon as it is built, the work at Camp 9 and Parrott's Ferry will probably continue in spite of efforts to stop it. As soon as it is established that the dam cannot be filled immediately, the Corps will face more legal action, and will almost certainly be forced to stop the destruction in the canyon.

The most striking feature of the new river efforts is the expertise of the F.O.R. group in Sacramento. After years of experience in the capitol and many trips to Washington D.C., these people are becoming more and more effective. Their efforts are often behind the scenes; there are not so many rallies, petitions, or letter writing campaigns, but the effectiveness shows.

The battle to save the Stanislaus has moved back into the realms of court decisions and legal work, but the supporters of the river are doing the hard work that needs to be done. If you want to see how ordinary people become an important force in government decisions, visit the F.O.R. office in Sacramento. They are fun people to meet and will welcome your help at doing chores in the office. After you've been there, you'll be ready to help spread the message: "Don't give up on the Stanislaus!"