

From: Scott Schoettgen
To: [commentletters](#)
Subject: Comment Letter – 2016 Bay Delta Plan Amendment & SED
Date: Monday, November 28, 2016 8:30:03 PM



Dear Jeanine Townsend,

My name is Scott Schoettgen, I am a California native and concerned citizen writing you to express my interest in the Bay-Delta Plan. I didn't know much about rivers and water before I started guiding rafts. I studied human sciences and public health in university, and since 2007 I have professionally guided whitewater rafting trips on 3 continents around the world. California waters, and the challenges California faces managing water, have naturally become a point of my intrigue.

My father's side of my family are decedents of the Donner Party, some of the original settlers to California in the mid 1800s before it became a state of the Union. Several generations later, my great grandfather fished for salmon that used to run all the way up the Stanislaus River through the town of Melones to feed his family. That town is now under water behind the New Melones Dam.

My father was one of many local people who fought in the 1970s to protect the Stanislaus River from the New Melones Dam, but inevitably he watched as the dam was filled and his favorite place on the planet was flooded and destroyed.

35 years later, because of California's current and extreme drought, I was able to see the old Stanislaus River for the first time in my life. The river my father fought so hard to protect emerged from the receding New Melones Reservoir, resembling its natural state as a river. In 2014, myself and the community of river people I associate with took the opportunity to float through a section of canyon of which we'd only heard stories. For the first time, we saw the dead canyon walls and old growth oaks still standing, now dead and black from decades spent submerged under hundreds of feet of water, silt banks piled 40 feet high in places along the rivers edge, and the unmistakable bathtub ring clearly marking a vertical division between natural beauty and what I can only describe as the consequences of an apocalyptic chapter of California river history.

The decision to flood the section of the Stanislaus River above the Parrotts Ferry Bridge was left up to a public vote in November of 1974, as is fair in a peaceful democracy. Unfortunately, in the case of proposition 17, the pro-dam contingent chose to play under a dishonest and disastrous set of their own rules. They ran a deception campaign in the areas known to have a majority anti-dam population, advertising "Save the Stan, vote 'no' on prop 17", when in fact voting "yes" would have pushed an initiative to place 'wild and scenic' designation of some sort on that section of river, the epicenter of the community. Many of the confused voting public inadvertently voted "no" on prop 17, believing they were voting to protect their beloved Old Stan, and instead unknowingly voted to stop the measure the water community had fought so hard to push forward.

I have revisited the old Stanislaus River several times with other groups since my initial exploration. By the end of summer 2015, those 40 foot tall silt banks had all been washed away, and willow stands upward of 15 feet tall lined the river banks. There was an abundance of new plant life, living symbols of nature's resilience and ability to regenerate life; reminders

that despite years of abuse, if we get out of nature's way and allow it to do its thing, it will rebound and provide everything we need to survive and thrive. But with new rains, the river that was briefly flowing freely again, is once again flooded and stagnant under New Melones reservoir. Any rejuvenation of the wild canyon was short-lived.

Without diving too much more into the past, I want to fast forward back to present day. This autumn/several weeks ago/early November 2016. I visited the Knights Ferry Bridge on the lower Stanislaus River, where I watched Chinook Salmon making their way up the river to spawn. There's something truly remarkable about watching salmon swim up river, the resiliency necessary for the species to make that journey, the beauty of the way the fish move with the current, and the way people gather along the shores of the river witness to the presence of a species that means so much for everything that lives in California, people and non-human life included.

As I mentioned, I studied the fields of public health and human sciences in college. The obvious point to make is that salmon are the world's best source of protein, vitamins, minerals, and healthy oils for humans. Historically, California salmon used to provide about 8.5 million pounds of food every year for people living on the land we now call California. Not anymore.

Salmon are also the foundation of the food chain for the wildlife in California, but we owe the world renowned fertility of Central California's agricultural land to salmon as well. Let me explain.

For a long time, scientists were puzzled as to why the agricultural lands in California's natural floodplains were so rich with minerals only otherwise known to be found out at sea. As it turns out, when millions of salmon used to run up California's waterways to spawn during the spring and fall each year, they served as a food source for about 100 other species. The nutrients they carried from the sea would make it into the soil, either directly through the decomposition of their dead carcasses, or indirectly through the digestive systems of their predators, before eventually re-fertilizing the soil. This natural fertilization process that happens with two healthy salmon runs per year (plus unimpaired flows from California's rivers feeding water out into the estuaries) makes California soil some of the richest in the world. Over half of all the nation's fresh produce is grown here is a direct result. Salmon are the reason those nutrients made it from the into the land.

However, over the last decades, at the same time while salmon numbers are only reaching a couple thousand in many California Rivers, the nutrient density of the agricultural products we find in most of our grocery stores is also consistently declining. That is, the rich vitamins and minerals that keep our immune systems functioning properly, rebuild our muscle tissue, maintain our bone quality, and keep our brains functioning at full capacity are disappearing from our foods. While a lot of California's food is imported/exported, the lack of local salmon available to the public, and subsequent decreased quality of local food that stays here for Californians, contributes to (among other things) more sick people, higher health care costs, and lower performance from our youth in schools.

Restoring unimpaired flows to the Delta would improve the quality of food for California's people, through direct consumption of salmon, and the indirect re-fertilization of our agricultural lands.

I know those aren't the sort of things running through the minds of kids pointing with pure joy

and wonderment at the few remaining salmon running up the Stanislaus River at Knight's Ferry, but those are the matters responsible citizens and elected officials/politicians need to consider when making decisions now for the future generations of Californians.

So back to the Old Stanislaus River. What's done is done. The generation of folks that fought to protect that river so my generation could grow up with it flowing freely didn't have their dream realized. It is unfortunate, but now we have an unprecedented opportunity to breathe life back into the waterways of California. Delivering 40% unimpaired flows to the Bay Delta is massive step in the right direction to ensure the health and prosperity for all of California's inhabitants for generations to come. I urge you to use your position to protect the commons, and grant California the opportunity to get the most out of its waterways.

Sincerely Yours,

Scott Schoettgen

Enjoy!
Scott