



Dear Members of the State Water Board,

For the past 25 years, I have rafted the Tuolumne River, from Meral's Pool to Don Pedro Reservoir. I have seen first-hand the depredation of the river habitat caused by too-little water flow. The banks are now, in many places, choked with willows right up to the water level of an August run. Tributary rivers, the Clavey and the North Fork of the Tuolumne, are choked with algae in the standing pools. All of this spells death to salmon spawn, which depends on free-running water over gravel. The eggs cannot survive in the oxygen-depleted algae-clogged waters. The Clavey is not dammed, so in these years of extreme drought, the main trunk of the Tuolumne becomes even more essential for the health of the salmon run.

I have noticed over the years that the young river-rafters have no idea what the health of this river used to look like. And indeed, I had become inured to many of the changes over the years, as I gloried in the swimming holes, the excitement of the rapids, and the negative ions along the dam-released flow. But this year, after having missed a year on the Tuolumne in 2015, the changes were absolutely undeniable.

It is absolutely imperative to protect the health of the rivers of California in order to protect against the collapse of California's wild salmon run and all the life that depends on that run (the fishing industry and wildlife), but to protect the fertile farmlands of the Delta from salt water incursion. Our children's children may never know what a healthy river looks like, much less what chinook salmon tastes like, unless we allow more water to run through our river canyons. As you are aware, the State Water Board's own report, Development of Flow Criteria for the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Ecosystem, determined that approximately 60% of unimpaired flow between February and June would be fully protective of fish and wildlife in the lower San Joaquin River and its three major tributaries. It's disappointing that the draft Substitute Environmental Document (SED) for Phase I of The Bay Delta Plan proposes establishing February through June unimpaired flow requirements of only 30% – 50% for the Merced, Tuolumne and Stanislaus Rivers.

Please take full advantage of this once-in-a-generation opportunity to advance a comprehensive, long-term strategy for restoring the Bay-Delta ecosystem. Sufficient instream flows must be central to your decision.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Laurie Lewis".

Laurie Lewis
12/12/2016