



California's Permanent Drought

By Jason Phillips

Friant Water Authority CEO

Everyone knows that January 2023 was extremely wet in California. Many areas experienced massive and, in some cases, devastating flooding. Reservoirs across the state are filling, and an entire year's worth of snow is already in many parts of the mountain range.

After several critically dry years requiring severe cutbacks, many people across the nation are asking the obvious question, "does this mean the California drought is over?"

The answer of course is "no."

Ironically, California's drought is not due to hydrology, we have always known that our hydrology is volatile, probably more so than anywhere else in the nation, with several dry years followed by extreme wet years and flooding. California's water management system was designed specifically to manage this volatile hydrology to store wet year water to be used in dry years.

But currently, even our system of magnificent dams and canals cannot meet the state's water needs. This is because decades after they were built, the government will no longer allow our water infrastructure to operate the way it was intended.

Starting in the early 1990's, as a result of state and federal laws, regulations, lawsuits, and decisions, (both by elected and unelected officials), reservoirs are not allowed to convey the water stored for the intended purposes, and instead a large percentage of water must now be sent to the ocean. Each year this problem is getting worse, and unelected government officials are allowed to divert more water away from homes, communities, and farms.

Is it worth rediverting all this water away from people? Frankly, I'm not the right person to ask whether this diversion of the public's precious resource is worth it. But I also don't think the right person to ask is the unelected government employee that has no accountability to the public.

People that are elected to represent us need to be the ones held accountable for decisions about how our most basic resources are managed and allocated. The laws need to be updated to rightly put the accountability for creating man-made droughts back on elected officials in an open and transparent fashion.

Stay tuned.

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