



Rx Fly Fishing!

The monthly newsletter of the Delta Fly Fishers!

Volume XLVI

Number XV

December 2022

Jerry Neuburger, Editor

Stockton, California

Calendar

- December 14, Member presentation night, John R. Williams School
- December 21, BOD Meeting, Nature Center, Oak Grove Park
- December 28, Open Tying, Nature Center, Oak Grove Park
- January 1, Mokelumne Outing, Van Assen Park
- January 11, GM meeting, John R. Williams School
- January 18, BOD meeting, Oak Grove Park Nature Center
- January 21, Installation dinner, Stockton Elks
- January 22-28, Outing, Baum Lake
- January 25, Open Tying, Oak Grove Nature Center
- February 8, GM Meeting, John R. Williams School, Stockton
- February 15, BOD Meeting, Oak Grove Nature Center

December 14 is Member's Night. Let the bragging begin...

By Al Smatsky

Let the bragging begin! On Wednesday December 14th the Delta Fly Fishers will feature the fishing trips and adventures of club members from 2022. Our scheduled list of speakers are: Bob Fujimura, Jerry Neuburger, Dan McDaniel, Dena Mason, Randy Baxter and more. This year's presentations will cover; trophy trout fishing in Nevada, our Delta Club's Annual Clearlake Outing, dorado and roosterfish in Baja, and BC salmon, just to name a few. This promises to be an outstanding evening of exciting stories and fish tales,,, some even true!



Nor do you need to present professional quality photo's, a short talk about your past years adventure (good or bad) is all that is needed. We still have space for other members to participate and welcome you to join in! Please email me at algofish@softcom.net or call Al Smatsky (209) 601-0819. All speakers are invited to join us for dinner at BJ Restaurant in Stockton at 5:15 pm before the program, please RSVP.

In addition to the presentations the raffle chair promises another Christmas raffle, this time featuring stocking stuffers that would warm any dedicated fly fisher's, regardless of sex, heart.

Remember, the December monthly meeting is our annual members' program night. This is your chance to shine! You need not fish an exotic location or catch giant fish to secure your place in history.

The meeting will begin at 7:00 pm at John R. Williams School, 2450 Meadow Avenue, Stockton. The public is encouraged to attend.

Items needed for the raffle/auction at installation dinner

By Jerry Neuburger

The huge donation made by member /Bruce Rollans is finally dwindling and we desperately need some top notch prizes for this year's installation dinner, especially rods, reels and other high quality gear. If you have some of the above collecting dust maybe it's time to move it rather than store it.

In addition to making space in your collection, you may also be able to claim a serious

tax deduction since the club is a registered 501c3 charity. You'll be able to deduct what the item actually draws as a sale price in the silent auction and the club treasurer will give you a receipt for the item that is valid as a tax deduction with the same amount off the amount due on your taxes.

Help yourself and help the club at the same time. Bring your donation to the club's December meeting and give it to the raffle chair/treasurer. Don't forget!

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Find DFF online at

<https://www.deltaflyfishers.com>

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<https://www.facebook.com/Delta-Fly-Fishers-Inc-265097290192284/>

Reminder, the Scott Sugimoto, December 10th, seminar is cancelled. All but two notified and refunded.

Sad to say, venue problems plus a lack of sign ups caused the club to cancel this year's and maybe future events as well. All of the sign ups have been refunded with the exception of two. N. Self, unknown club affiliation and new DFF member, D. VanSchenck. N. Self was sent an email asking for a mailing address with no response while new member D. VanSchenck's check was returned as:

"Return to sender, not deliverable as addressed, unable to forward."

If you know either, or you are one of the two individuals mentioned, please forward a valid snail mail address so that the treasurer, [J. Neuburger](#), can mail you a refund check. In the meantime the funds will remain in limbo, with checks written and no place to deliver them.

Has a year passed already? Yup, and it's time for Opening Day on the Moke

By Jerry Neuburger

Time is a funny thing, while it sometimes drags, it also sometimes flies by so fast that it's almost as if no time has passed at all. When I think back to the end of 2021 I remember that I spent most of the month

in Italy before returning but when I think of writing newsletters, it seems like I wrote an article about New Years day on the Moke only weeks ago, Ok, you newer members are asking, what is this old man ruminating about? I'll explain. The club's longest standing tradition, older than the annual installation dinners, older than meeting at John R. Williams School, older than the club's supporting the SJ P&R Trout Bouts, is New Year's Day on the Mokelumne. It's a wet or dry, cold or warm tradition that the club sets up a pavilion at the first parking lot at Van Assen Park on the Mokelumne at the base of Camanche Dam at 06:30 and stocks it with coffee, hot chocolate, and donuts for all and any anglers willing to show up and, maybe even fish the Moke on opening day, which happens to be the first day in January.

The event is well attended with as many as 30+ members rotating through the club facility, some coming to fish and others

just to wish others, Happy New Years,

As the day warms and morning moves into the early noon hours the food selection changes from donuts to tube steaks, (hot dogs if you don't get it) on buns, chili and what ever else may be offered



Memories from January 1, 2017. Photo by J. Neuburger

In the past the event's preparations and eventual fulfillment was conducted by the some of the club's oldest and most veteran members. However, in truth, some of these members are now reaching the point in their history where

they might appreciate a little help in the venture, either in the set up and tear down or in purchasing the supplies necessary to make the day a memorable one,

New Members: Don't be shy, we need you to attend and meet the other guys and girls in the club. You new members of these last few years are destined to become the old grizzled veterans of tomorrow, you will inherit this first tradition to make it your own, So everyone, whether you joined last week, or are a founding member, be there.

Oh, and by the way, a few fish are even caught on this first of the year event,

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Susan Baker

Catfish Derby (June)

Susan Baker

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Bob Fujimura

Outings

Chair needed

Programs

Al Smatsky

209-368-9261

Bob Sousa

209-368-2683

Property/Historian

Charlie Reames

Refreshments

Mike Dempewolf

Rod Building

Bob Fujimura

209-339-0683

Trout Bout (November)

Susan Baker

Webmaster

Amy Terra

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FLY FISHERS
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Do you want to improve your casting? How about some free lessons from some of the nation's top casters?

By Robert Fujimura
Saturday Dec 10 - Free Casting in SF Park: Looking for alternative for not fly fishing in middle of winter? Why not improve your fly casting in a beautiful location. Come to the *Golden Gate Casting Ponds at 1232*

John F Kennedy Dr. San Francisco, CA 94122. Lessons run from 9:30 to 12:30. Rods available for loan for the lessons. Clinics available for all levels of casting led by the Golden Gate Angling and Casting Club of San Francisco. Participants must preregister on online via

the GGACC website. More information available at A few of the DFF officers participate in this monthly GGACC event; contact Amy (deltaflywebmaster@gmail.com) or Bob Fujimura (deltaflyfishers@gmail.com) on information on these classes.

Fly tying during the holidays

By Bob Fujimura'
Wednesday Dec 28 - Open Fly Tying Session: Join other DFF members as they meet at Nature Center for last Wednesday evening in 2022 for a no-host fly

tying session. Tie with your fellow members, sharing the latest fishing stories, and hang out with new and old friends. This will be a free event and open to club members from 6:00 to 8:30 pm at the *Oak Grove Regional*

Park's Nature Center, Eight-Mile Road, Stockton. Contact Bob Fujimura at deltaflyfishers@gmail.com for more information this activity and how to enter the Park afterhours.

Put it on your calendars, the club's annual installation dinner is scheduled for January 21st at the Stockton Elks Club

By JerryNeuburger

The Board of Directors are not dragging their feet on this one, it's just that we can't get all the information to set the menu and prices yet. We've made the reservations for the date and time but still don't know what the caterer will offer and what will be charged for the dinners. Since we don't know, we can't say for sure whether the dinner cost per person will remain at \$35 or we will have to raise the price to \$40.

We're hoping that Sondra, our caterer, will still be able to offer her signature salad, veggies, roasted red potatoes and prime rib or some type of Italian Chicken along with a vegetarian dish, either butternut squash ravioli or eggplant parmigiana with carrot cake for dessert as in the past but we'll just have to wait until she puts her menus together.

When we find out, members will be able to

purchase dinners either online using a credit or debit card as in the past or by sending in a check. In order to make the whole thing as simple as possible, the directors plan to send out a mailer with an



The installation dinner back in 2015. Photo by J. Neuburger

order form inside, along with a return envelope so that members can fill out the form and mail in a check to cover the costs.

Some members have asked if it is possible

to sell raffle tickets online as well as at the venue but the State of California says that doing so is illegal.

Speaking of the same, this year's raffle and silent auction, while not as full of prizes as the last few, (yes, Bruce Rollan's donations are finally running out with only a few thousand left in value to be added to this year's prizes.) the two should please most members with an expected overall value of well over \$5,000 in items. In order to make it more attractive the directors have authorized the raffle chair to spend close to \$2,000 towards prizes and let's not forget the donated guided trips that are likely to be part of the mix.

In order to participate, you have to be there. And to be there you need to do two things, first reserve the date, January 21, and then, when available, purchase your dinner tickets.

Although we're missing our usual early start, it doesn't mean we will have a less rewarding finish.

November's Trout Bout was a big success due to an abundance of volunteers

It was with some anxiety that the club took on the November Trout Bout. One of the event's stalwarts, Charlie Reames had injured his foot and was not able to shop for supplies and the event's previous chief cook and bottle washer, Karen Keagy, had retired. Beyond that Dena Mason was on vacation in Florida and the new chair, Nancy Baker, was too sick to lend support.

However, as it turned out, all the worry was for nothing since ex club president Amy Terra and Trout Bout veteran worker, Brenda McIntosh stepped in to guide the day's activities on the day of the event and club treasurer, Jerry Neuburger did the before event shopping for the supplies. In fact, the two, Amy and Brenda added several items to the menu, cups of instant noo-



This 8 lb. 11 oz. trout took first place in the adult's division. Photo by Ron Forbes

dle soup and "walking tacos".

Amy had made a suggestion that the club

set up the facility the day before. That suggestion made a huge difference in the early hours of the event, getting things rolling, with early coffee and hot chocolate.

And a stream load of volunteers, many new to the event, really helped with the manpower. In fact, they were so numerous that I hesitate to mention them for fear that a name will be left out. Sandi from SJ P&R provided the club with two golf carts and they were manned by two crewTs most of the day. Sales were brisk and the snack bar closed early, selling out before 11am. A few DFFers hung around for weighing duties and the awards ceremonies.

The next event, the Bob McMillian Memorial Trout Bout will take place in March, 2023. If it is supported like this last one, we're in good shape.

Upcoming Outings in Early 2023

By Bob Fujimura

Greetings new and veteran DFF members, planning for the 2023 fly fishing season has already begun and the outing leaders are planning for some varied and interesting venues for the first quarter of the New Year.

Sunday January 1 – Opening Day on the Mokelumne River: Come celebrate the New Year and join in the annual DFF tradition of hanging out on opening day at the Mokelumne River. We will have food to share. For sure, we will have coffee and donuts in the morning! Early birds arrive with the coffee around 6:30. Look for the DFF poster and tent! Touch bases with old friends and watch newer ones fly fish the opening day.

Thursday January 24 – Sun 22 – International Sportmen's Expo: Not an organized or hosted club event but it is another favorite venue for meeting old friends and viewing fly fishing ac-

tivities such as free fly fishing presentations and fly tying demonstrations.

January 22 through 28 Baum Lake: Join stillwater leader Jerry Neuburger. Fly fish one of the productive winter fisheries and camp at the Cassel PG&E campground. The CDFW Crystal Spring Hatchery is on this water course and provides generous releases of catchable and brood stock trout during the winter. Severe weather cancels.

Saturday February 18 – Lower Yuba River: Bob Fujimura is hosting a free, one-day clinic starting at the Hammon Grove Park, Brown Valley, CA to share fly fishing tips and tour fly fishing locations at this important wild trout and salmon water. This outing will likely compliment the earlier scheduled talk by guide Lance Gray at the February 15th general meeting. This time of the year is a peak period for nymphing and dry fly fishing.

Saturday March 11 – Lower Sacramento River Float Trip: Guide Scott Sugimoto and Bob Fujimura will be hosting another guided group trip to this very productive fishery for large wild resident rainbow trout. Great outing for experienced and beginning fly fishers, guide fees include fly fishing gear, group BBQ lunch, shuttle, and tips. More information on this new outing to come.

Tuesday March 28 – Thursday 30 – Pyramid Lake Outing: Catch the largest cutthroat trout of your lifetime at this world class fly fishing destination. Seriously, even beginners can catch fish up to 10-15 lbs on their first visit! Host Jerry Neuburger has changed the 2023 outing to weekdays to make it easier to find suitable fishing locations and allowing participants more flexibility to choose their own lodging and meals. Severe weather cancels.



A hidden gem

By Amy Terra

I had heard of the casting ponds in San Francisco but had never seen them in person as I am not a city girl, and rarely ventured into the city unless I had to go for work or for my favorite band's concert. As I began to spend more and more time with casting instructors and casting instructor candidates, I continued to hear more and more about the casting ponds in Golden Gate Park and finally made plans to go and see them for myself. When I finally made my pilgrimage there, I found this hidden and beautiful oasis in the city.

The casting ponds are three thigh deep ponds and a historic lodge located across from the bison pasture and next to the law enforcement horse stables in Golden Gate Park. This area is known as the Golden Gate Angling and Casting Club. The pools are concrete with sloping sides, 450 feet wide by 185 feet long, according to the National Park Service. The lodge is a one-story wood frame building north of the casting pools. The lodge is a beautiful rustic structure replete with fish details. If you look closely at the lodge's shutters, you can see carved fish motifs. There are building high lockers for rod storage and the walls

are adorned with pictures and memorabilia representing the casting and angling club's long history.

The Golden Gate Angling and Casting Club was organized in June 1933 as an offshoot of the San Francisco Fly Casting Club, which itself was formed in 1894. Local casters had small facilities at Stow Lake, which the club was outgrowing by the late 1930s. As part of a response to the ongoing Great Depression, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) was established as a job creation program. The San Francisco club heard about the WPA funding a casting pool in Portland, Oregon, and was inspired to get in on the action. The WPA funded and built Golden Gate Park's Angler's Lodge and casting pools in 1938.

A formal dedication for the casting pools was held on March 5, 1939. (Footage of the dedication is available to watch online at <https://vimeo.com/188550829>.) Casters generally stand on the docks along the pools to cast, with space for a caster to stand a few feet below the water in a sub-water level pit area. Casting at the ponds is open to the public and you can find a variety of people performing a variety of casts at any given time. There is also a laid back vibe that can be found there

with people hanging out at the lodge's stone deck exchanging fish stories or playing musical instruments. Any given day, the ponds are a great place to be and gives you the feeling of being in a secluded space and not in the middle of a bustling city.

Golden Gate Casting and Angling Club holds free casting lessons for all levels of casters on the second Saturday of each month. This day is a great time to come to the ponds and not only get free casting lessons from certified casting instructors and casting instructor candidates, but experience the ponds on a day filled with casting fun. The next free casting day is December 10th. Check it out [here](#).

Going to the ponds, particularly on free lessons on second Saturdays is an amazing experience and something I highly recommend to anyone even slightly interested in fly casting. The address is 1232 JFK Dr., across from the Buffalo Paddock), San Francisco. Hope to see you at the ponds!

(Historical information from San Francisco Richmond Review, 8/6/2021)

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Additional column inches of ad space may be purchased at \$200 for the year, \$100 for six months, \$50 for a quarter year, \$20 per month.

Included:

A digital subscription to the club's monthly newsletter.

Permission to post specials and other advertising on the [club's Face book page](#), 2 per month.

For additional information please phone or

NCCFFI December Report by Mark Rockwell

This has been a very crazy few weeks. We celebrate a very successful Yuba Fest up in Sycamore Ranch park on the Yuba River, the Project Healing Waters online auction, and the final approval from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) for the surrender of the license to operate the Klamath hydropower project from PacifiCorp to the Klamath River Renewal Corporation. All of these were historic for different reasons. I will give some thoughts on all:

Yuba Fest - October 15 & 16

Without question, this event was a success for our clubs, for fly fishing as a sport, and for NCCFFI. We worked hard, with Clay Hash's leadership and Gold Country Fly Fishers volunteers to make this an event we'd be proud of and for attendees to have fun and learn. More than 200 attended including our teaching sessions on fishing the Yuba River, fishing technical waters, learning to fly fish, and how to fly cast. The fly casting skills development program was a big hit with the leadership of Russ Carpenter & Sarah Trenchel and other certified casters from the Golden Gate Angling & Casting Club. People enjoyed a good lunch and daytime music from the Harmony Grove Band, and a BBQ dinner of Tri Tip, Chicken or a vegetarian lasagna with trimmings. After dinner we were treated to the music of Karrie O'Neil, a Reno, NV singer/songwriter. Sunday was a day long course of fishing technical waters with Clay Hash, where technical casting and techniques to use on waters like spring creeks. It was a great weekend!

Klamath River License Surrender - The Dams are Coming Out!

"After more than 100 years of being dammed, the lower Klamath River will flow free once again" said Dr. Mark Rockwell, President of Northern California Council, Fly Fishers International (NCCFFI) in his press statement on November 17, 2022. It has taken decades of advocacy by Native American Tribes who depend on a living Klamath River for their cultural identity and food security, as well as the states of California and Oregon, the dams' owner, federal agencies, and several nonprofits, including NCCFFI, to navigate the lengthy planning, fundraising, regulatory and project design processes. But finally on November 17, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) approved the hydropower License Surrender to remove four dams from the Klamath River.

The Klamath was once a highly productive salmon river with one million fish returning to the river each year. The dams changed that creating a river chocked with toxic algae (cyanobacteria), breeding fish-killing parasites and water too warm to support its natural fishery. In 1918, the Copco 1 Dam was completed, cutting Klamath salmon off from the upper part of the basin. Over the next 44 years, three more dams were built (Iron Gate, Copco 2, and J.C. Boyle dams) on the river in California and Oregon, effectively closing off 400 miles of habitat to salmon and steelhead, ultimately resulting in dramatic fish population declines. Removing the dams will end these problems. The fish will be able to return to habitat they have not seen for a century. Cyanobacteria will be no longer be a problem – it does not persist in flowing water. The beautiful Klamath River will be better able to sustain life.

Barring any further interruptions, pre-construction will start

in the summer of 2023, with the first dam - Copco 2 - coming down by the Fall. The other 3 dams - Copco 1, J.C. Boyle & Iron Gate - will be removed by October, 2024. That will begin a 7 year process to rehabilitate and restore the watershed, and monitor the process. The hatchery now at Iron Gate will be closed and operations will move to the newly rehabilitated hatchery on Fall Creek. This will operate for up to 7 years, with the hopes that in-river spawning will provide enough natural salmon to support closure by the end of 2031.

It is impossible to convey the essence of this accomplishment. My personal involvement now spans 20 years, with a break between 2015-18, when Lowell Ashbaugh stood in for NCCFFI. Lowell held the flag high and keep our voice in the effort. Thank You, Lowell!!

I've spent thousands of hours on calls, zoom meetings, on-site meetings in Oregon & California, and written hundreds of articles, given more than 30 presentations inside and outside the fly fishing world, and given talks to community service groups and clubs all in the grand hopes that we would prevail. It is with great pride and happiness that I can say - We Did It! In the end, the Tribes, fishery and river watershed are the great winners, for they are the ones who had the most at stake. We fly fishers had to be part of the advocacy effort that made this happen, and the Northern Calif. Council, FFI took on the challenge. We can all take pride for that effort. FFI members, fly club members, and those who gave time & money over the years are all thanked to have contributed to Lowell and I being able to represent our community. We are humbled by this support and by all those we worked with to make this happen. It did not come without great effort.



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The dams are coming down and big changes in Westlands Water District

Three-quarters of the earth's surface is water. One-fourth is land. It's quite clear the good Lord intended us to spend triple the amount of time fishing as [opposed to] taking care of the lawn.

Chuck Clark

THE KLAMATH DAMS ARE FINALLY COMING DOWN

After years of contention, the four hydroelectric dams on the Klamath River are finally being removed. Early this November the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) allowed PacifiCorp to concede the dams license to a non-profit organization supported by the states of California and Oregon. The dams being removed are the Iron Gate, the J.C. Boyle, and Copco #1 and Copco #2. Two of the dams are more than 100 years old. The dam removal project will be the largest in the nation's history.

Over twenty years ago I first became aware of the problems the dams were causing our salmon and steelhead populations. As directors of the Northern California Council of the Federation of Fly Fishers (NCCFFF) we would hear reports from our Conservation Chair about proposals to remove the four dams. We also learned why it was imperative the dams be removed. The dams are toxic to the salmon and steelhead fisheries and the Klamath's environment. As a source of hydroelectric power the dams are insignificant to the local power grid. Like most people, I had no idea just how complex these environmental/political issues can be. NCC's Conservation Chair Mark Rockwell would give reports of a positive step forward then at the next meeting he would report those actions had stalled or been reversed. This cycle has continued for well over 20 years. But it was an absolute necessity that the dams be removed for a multitude of reasons.

The Klamath dams have destroyed native American tribes' way of life in Southern Oregon and Northern California. The dams are causing the near-extinction of the Klamath River's salmon and steelhead fisher-

ies. Salmon have been the prime source of food for these tribes for thousands of years. The dams blocking the salmon's spawning habitat have destroyed the fish as a food source. The tribes most affected are the Klamath, the Hupa, the Karu and the Yuroks. The dams have also devastated the state's commercial and sport



Irongate Dam on the Klamath.

fish fisheries along with the environment. The Klamath River's problems began in earnest in 1906 with the construction of Klamath Irrigation Project's (KIP) first canal. They then completed Copco #1 and Copco #2 by 1918. In the 1930's the Klamath Irrigation Project had nearly wiped out both the salmon and steelhead populations. They then built the J.C. Boyle Dam and the Iron Gate Dam in 1958 and 1964. These dams continued to worsen tribes' lives and culture. The fish population had dropped to the point the state of California banned all commercial and sport fishing in the mid-1930s. This ban was on and off and was upheld in the courts into the late 70's as California's Supreme Court upheld the ban. The court's bans sparked major conflict and violence from both sides. However, in 1979 the court upheld an earlier decision that "the tribes were entitled to 50% of the harvestable salmon and that they should become co-managers of the state's fisheries." This decision cooled the violence but did nothing to restore the salmon fishery.

With the dams still in place the fisheries continued to decline. For thousands of years the native tribes of Northern California and Oregon have been dependent on salmon as a major food source.

The loss of this food source has been catastrophic to the tribes. Diana Hartel, who documents native tribes, illustrates the destruction of the native Americans way of life after the loss of salmon. She has observed, "Native families increasingly filled their bellies with store bought-bought and government commodity foods-cheap starches, fats and sugar. Chronic unemployment, despair and addictions rose in the gap left by the vanishing life in the river. The collapse of First Nations fisheries has brought deeping poverty and with it soaring rates of diabetes."

Almost 15 years ago the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Association filed suits and complained, "The remaining water left in the river, whatever the Project is willing to release from the Iron Gate Dam, is so little in volume, so hot and laced with pesticides and nitrates from agricultural waste water that it is often fatal for salmon as much as 100 miles downriver. Hundreds of thousands of salmon have been killed as a result, and the Klamath River coho salmon driven nearly to extinction. Many of us remember the '02 fish kill that wiped out as many as 93,000 salmon. Former Vice President Dick Cheney, on behalf of Klamath ranchers and farmers, approved water diversions that instigated the massive kill. Cheney's fish kill is another example of political favors given to supporters regardless of the consequences. However, Cheney's action actually generated increasing support for removal of the Klamath's dams.

By 2005 the KIP (Klamath Irrigation Project) had relinquished control of its four dams to Warren Buffet's PacifiCorp and they applied for relicensing the dams. The new dam license would be tantamount to a 50 year extension of fish kills leading to extinction of the salmon. The tribes appealed to Buffett personally and he refused help and gave them a condescending lecture on "corporate policy." However, in 2013 the US Department of the Interior released its Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) recommending removal of all four dams. Congress would have to adopt a Klamath Hydroelectric Settlement



(Continued on page 8)

(Continued from page 7)

Agreement (KHSA). Once again congress failed to act. However, as part of a complex process and federal requirements, PacifiCorp would be held financially responsible for upgrading the dams and required to provide for "devices for fish passage." The cost to the corporation would be overwhelming. They walked out of the deal. The four hydroelectric dams only generate 2% of the power grid that services about 70,000 ratepayers. The income generated by the four dams would be insignificant compared to the massive cost of restoring the dams and providing fish passage requirements. The projected cost to remove the four dams is estimated to be at least \$459 million.

The bottom line: the final obstacle preventing the removal of all four Klamath dams has been overcome. It will be the largest dam removal project in U.S. history surpassing the removal of the Elwah River dams about 10 years ago. We will now reopen well over 100 miles of salmon habitat, restore fish passage in the Klamath River, get rid of the river's toxins and sediment, and restore the river's environment. It's hoped the process will begin within a few months. Removing the dams is a major step forward to save the salmon.

A CHANGING OF THE GUARD: WESTLANDS WATER DISTRICT'S MAJOR SHAKE-UP

Those who support a healthy self-sustaining Delta are all too familiar with the Westlands Water District (WWD). For over 20 years we have watched WWD's continuing attempts divert more and more water from the Delta regardless of the consequences. The district's actions have been to grab water for their wealthy-farmer clients by any means possible, all the time realizing their action would devastate the Delta farmers, Delta Business, the estuarine's environment and fisheries. Their attitude has been one of "me first" regardless of the consequences. They have been ruthless in their attempts. A recent article by SJ Valley Water explained major changes happening within America's most politically powerful, wealthy water district.

Over 20 years ago Westlands hired Tom Birmingham as their general counsel. Several years later he was given the general manager's position. Birmingham soon initiated massive lobbying efforts for WWD on the local, state and federal levels. Next he began major litigious

actions to alter the structure of the Deltas operation to divert even more water from the Delta for WWD. His attitude and style are both obnoxious and notorious. He became egregiously self-important and domineering. During the Trump Administration David Bernhart was appointed Secretary of the Interior (SOTI). Prior to his appointment, Bernhart was a major lobbyist for Westlands. The Bureau of Reclamation is controlled by the Department of the Interior. Westland's has access to the Deltas water via the federal Central Valley Project (CVP). From 2019 to the end of Trump's tenure Birmingham worked with Bernhart and together they did everything possible to enhance Westlands ability to divert water from the Delta by way of the CVA. Westlands and Bernhart accomplished this using "closed door" sweetheart deals. Of course public input and disclosure were neglected.

Because of Birmingham's poor planning during the drought and climate change, Westlands now finds itself between a rock and a hard place. Over the years seeds of discontent planted by Birmingham have taken root. Unhappy farm members within the district formed a coalition to fire their general manager. The farmers in WWD do not farm "mom and pop" operations but operate politically powerful, wealthy corporations. Sara Woolf is a member of the coalition that wanted to fire Birmingham. She spoke against Birmingham by saying, "There needs to be a change in leadership, that's a foundational issue. WWD is "mired in outdated methods that it is fighting over scraps."

Geologically, Westlands has a unique problem. The WWD lays over formations of Corcoran clay. The clay is impenetrable and does not let water penetrate to subsurface depths needed to recharge the groundwater supply. Normal recharging of the groundwater is not possible by normal means. The water has to be forced underground at high pressure. For years Birmingham has neglected recharging Westlands groundwater. Westlands has notoriously over pumped groundwater causing the land to sink more than 25 feet



Westland's Tom Birmingham

in some areas. The stark reality is Westlands has seriously over drafted its aquifer without replacing any of its water.

A large coalition of growers are very angry with Birmingham's lack of action and poor judgement. Other water districts saw the light and started to comply with the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) over eight years ago. But WWD has done almost nothing to comply with the act. Over the last few years the staff has received more than 400 permits for water injection sites. However, the district will only have completed nine sites by the end of 2023. Private landowners have seen the writing on the wall and have 20 injection wells in place and functioning. Five years ago during our last "wet year" Westlands was not able to take advantage of the massive runoff and lost a

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(Continued from page 8)

huge opportunity to restore groundwater. They still will not be able to restore groundwater, should it become available until late next year.

After months of discussion, angry meetings and much contention, Westlands had an election for members of their Board of Directors early in November. The group wanting a change of direction in WWD won. Their primary goal was to fire Tom Birmingham and change district policy to get in line with policies that accurately reflect conditions. They won. Most of us thought that their November 28 meeting would be Birmingham's last day with WWD. However, he has announced his "retirement" on the 31st of December.

The new board has announced their agenda. It is:

- . Urgently develop groundwater recharge
- . Create clear pumping regulations
- . Develop a strategic plan that incentivizes farming alternatives including land retirement, conversion to solar or other uses.
- . Improve relations with other water districts, disadvantaged communities, environmental and drinking water advocacy groups.

A newly-elected director from Woolf Farming was quoted saying, "My number one issue is recharge projects. We won't survive unless we are able to soak up as much water in wet years to get us through dry years. The district's focus on politics, litigation, and fighting against the regulatory landscape has neglected possible regional solutions."

For over 20 years WWD has done everything legal and illegal to grab as much water as they can for their members. Never have their water grabs been concerned about the ethics and morality of what their actions would do to other farmers, cities, businesses or the environment. They usurped over 100 thousand of acre feet of water for water intensive crops in arid or desert conditions. They have a reprehensible reputation for closed door sweetheart deals that have taken state and federal water. They have committed fraud by trying to float a public bond with "cooked books." Fortunately, the Security Exchange Commission caught them. Their list of wrongdoing goes on and on. Now because of the drought and climate change and Birmingham's ineptness, the water district is in dire straits with serious problems. For the last two years WWD has received 0% of their normal allotment

from the Central Valley Project. With the strong possibility of the drought continuing they may not get any water this year. But frankly, it's difficult to have any empathy for them.

While the demise of Tom Birmingham is good news, it will take some time for Westlands to prove to the water world that they are now a cat of a different color. As it is, the corporations that run the water agency have proven themselves to be the greediest users and are a powerful political force.

Their fingers reaching into the state water agency are legendary for inside deals and closed hearings. They've been able to get water delivered on a, "by hook or by crook," basis for so long that I'm sure the members consider themselves privileged. It will be a wait and see game for a number of water cycles before this one eyed jack shows the other side of its face. Ed.