

Read at 9/19/2011 Board Meeting
Oral Communications.
Submitted text on 9/20/11

Good Evening,

My name is Dick Heuer. I served on this board for 13 years before giving up on my effort to solve our water problem. I assume that you have read the two columns I wrote recently in the Herald arguing that it may be possible to get NOAA approval to build a New Los Padres Dam, and you should not ignore that possibility.

I'm not going to repeat what I said in those columns. Instead, I'm going to focus on specific action I would take if I were still on this board. As I understand it, the NOAA person you are dealing with is somewhat of an extremist. I've been told that she believes that all dams are bad. All existing dams should be removed. And she thinks that everyone of importance agrees with her. Personally, I view that as encouraging rather than discouraging. It means she is so extreme that if you go over her head to deal with more senior personnel you may be able to get her decisions reversed. I believe NOAA does have at least some senior managers who recognize that it is sometimes necessary and appropriate to reach a compromise between the interest of the steelhead trout and the public interest. That compromise is what I outlined in one of my columns.

I served 3 terms as chairman of this board. If I were chairman again, I'd go to Washington together with my General Manager to interview lobbyists who are experienced in dealing with NOAA's Marine Fisheries Service. And I'd HIRE the one who has the best contacts in NOAA, who can best educate me on relevant NOAA processes, and inform me of relevant decisions NOAA has made in other similar cases. This is important not only to gain a better estimate of the feasibility of building a new dam. You may need this just to be effective in protecting the existing Los Padre Dam. As I understand it, your local NOAA contact is talking about requiring you to tear that down, and she has in the past gotten most of what she asked for.

I understand that some of you are opposed to putting a new dam back on your agenda for serious consideration. I ask you, what's YOUR plan. I hear a lot of talk about a lot of different projects that may or may not be able to provide us with some more water. But I have not heard of any specific plan that spells out, this is our goal, this is how we're going to achieve this goal. Here's our timeline and an estimate of what it will cost. It would not be very difficult to develop such a plan for a new dam, as so much research has already been done on it.

The Regional Desal Project was such a plan, but a few dishonest people manipulated your district out of having any say about the financing of that plan, even though 90% of the cost would be paid for by your constituents, who are expecting you to protect their interests. That was shameful. Hopefully, that project will collapse, and then it will be your responsibility to develop a new water supply project for your constituents. Until you've developed such a plan, you have a due diligence responsibility to investigate and compare all serious alternatives. That includes a serious effort to assess the feasibility of getting approval for a new dam.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak here tonight. If anyone has any questions, I'd be happy to answer them....