



# SIERRA CLUB

## TEHIPITE CHAPTER

### With Salmon on the Brink of Extinction, the Trump Administration Ignores Reality, Violates Federal Reclamation Law: Part 1

by Gary Lasky

The San Francisco Bay Delta is the largest inland estuary in the world, a rich ecosystem positioned where the Pacific Ocean meets the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers. Its complex habitat includes stocks of salmon and steelhead fish, and nearly a dozen federally endangered fish species. As are all estuaries, the Delta is a brackish water feature open at both ends, a contested geography where saline ocean water pushes in to meet the mountain rivers fed by rainfall and snowmelt.

The Delta is fed by the Sacramento River from the distant Siskiyou Mountains near the Oregon border; and the San Joaquin River from the Sierra Nevada range to the east, which flows across the flat and hot San Joaquin Valley. Where these mighty rivers meet the Delta, a brackish mixing zone is created, which shifts east and west depending on the season: eastward in the dry spring and summer months and westward in California's wet season when its rivers run high, historically from the first rains in October through March, but less certainly since our increasingly frequent droughts in the past two decades.

The Delta ecosystem is, to put it bluntly, on life support, a victim of excessive water withdrawals over more than a century. Unless brought back from the brink through an organized recovery effort by state and federal agencies, the salmon, steelhead trout, and nearly a dozen other fish listed under the federal and state Endangered Species Act will go extinct, the Delta's biodiversity converted to a marine environment.

If it collapses, the Delta's demise will have been caused by a lack of political will and an economic system which fails to recognize the value of Nature unless it can be captured and sold, as is the river water, diverted to San Joaquin Valley billionaire farms and Los Angeles. In a battle of powerful financial interests, the fish have been losing, its \$1.3 billion commercial fishery closed three years in a row, waiting to see if the salmon, which live for just three years, can make yet another comeback from the brink of extinction.

The Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) lies within the U.S. Department of the Interior. It is the federal agency responsible for the Central Valley Project (CVP), a complex, New Deal-era "water-conveyance system" created to erect



State Water Project California Aqueduct  
Credit: California Department of Water Resources

dams, canals, and other infrastructure to deliver irrigation water from the Sierra Nevada to San Joaquin Valley farmers. It was devised for family farms which lie along the foothills of the Sierra, the so-called Eastside San Joaquin Valley, but not the arid Westside San Joaquin Valley lands which lie in the rain shadow of the Coast Range.

In the early 1990s, recognizing the decline of the Delta habitat for fish and other aquatic species, Congress passed into law the Central Valley Improvement Act (CVPIA), which was supposed to ensure sufficient flows of the Delta's rivers into and through it to the Pacific Ocean, but these protections to the salmon and the Delta have never been realized. This is due to constant, intense pressure from the wealthiest San Joaquin Valley farmers from Fresno to Bakersfield, and their slick, effective propaganda, deliberately concealing the damage to the Delta habitat, and denying the reality that the finite supply of California water has been vastly overpromised to competing priorities and interest groups. And since salmon neither vote nor make campaign contributions, they continue to lose.

These government policies are sponsored by the Agricultural industry, executed by the billionaire growers' hand-picked representatives in Sacramento and Congress and the Trump administration.

The Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act (WIIN Act) Is a 2016 statute, one of a series of historic compromises between powerful, competing interests to allocate surface water deliveries. Southern California's large metropolitan regions with municipal and industrial water needs are always seeking new supplies; central California farmers in the 300-mile long, 50-mile-wide San Joaquin Valley, adjacent to the Sierra range; and northern California's cities and farms, where the majority of California's precipitation falls.

The WIIN Act provides the mechanism—though not the funding—to enable the construction of dams and waterways which make the capture and conveyance of water possible on a massive scale, under both the CVP and the State Water Project (SWP), which carries water from northern California southward to the San Joaquin Valley and (primarily), urban water customers in Central and Southern California via the California Aqueduct, which can be seen from Interstate 5.

#### TO BE CONTINUED



U.S. Bureau of Reclamation  
Credit: Rock Design Associates, National Wildlife Federation

#### Thursday, Nov. 6 at 7:00 PM Woodward Park Regional Library

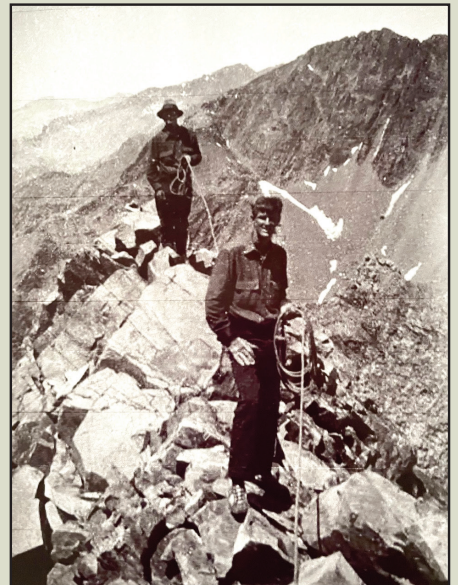
The Tehipite Chapter of the Sierra Club presents, "Mountains and Music: Ansel Adams and Jules Eichorn, A Lifelong Friendship."

This program will tell the story of how Jules Eichorn's piano teacher, Ansel Adams, shaped his life with regard to music, mountains and the environment.

We will also see a "home movie" of the first ascent of the Higher Cathedral Spire from April 15, 1934 by Jules Eichorn, Richard Leonard and Bestor Robinson. This marked the beginning of modern rock climbing in Yosemite Valley, according to Galen Rowell.

This program will be presented by the daughter of Jules Eichorn, Linda Renfro, who will share personal insights into the lives of these legendary figures of the Sierra.

Free and open to the general public.



Pioneering climber Jules Eichorn  
Credit: Linda Renfro, private collection