



The Water Grab

Contact: Steven Maviglio 916-607-8340

**FARMERS, LAWMAKERS, CONSERVATIONISTS, FISHERMAN LAUNCH
EFFORT TO DERAIL “DAM TRAIN” INITIATIVE**
*Opponents to Measure Moving High Speed Rail Funds Call Ballot Measure a “Trojan
Horse” That Will Imperil Water Projects Aimed at Easing California Drought Impacts*

SACRAMENTO, March 10, 2016 -- Calling it a “Trojan horse” that will imperil billions of dollars in projects designed to ease the impact of the drought, a broad coalition of farmers, fishermen, water organizations, conservationists and lawmakers from throughout California today launched an effort to derail a ballot measure that may appear on the November ballot that calls for shifting funds from the state’s high speed rail project to water projects.

State Senator Jim Nielsen (R-Gerber) and Assemblymember James Gallagher (R-Plumas Lake) were joined by Tim Johnson of the California Rice Industry Association, David Guy of the Northern California Water Association, Jay Ziegler of The Nature Conservancy, Nicole VanVleck of Montna Farms, and Manuel Cunha of the Nesei Farmers League of Fresno in announcing the “Stop the Special Interest Water Grab” campaign to keep the measure off the ballot.

“If this Trojan horse gets onto the ballot and wins, it will derail everything we’ve worked for with the water bond, threatening billions of dollars of projects essential to address the drought,” says Guy. “It blows up the plan that two-thirds of Californians supported to build new water supplies and improve water efficiency for everyone’s benefit.”

“This ballot initiative is being sold to voters as the killer of the high speed rail project and that’s simply disingenuous,” said Johnson. “Our coalition has both opponents and supporters of high speed rail. The true purpose of this measure is to rewrite California water law to benefit a few large agricultural water users who are exhausting their surface and ground water supplies.”

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Initiative opponents also criticized the measure for creating a new state agency to determine what water bond projects receive funds, throwing out the law established in Prop. 1 that gives such authority to the California Water Commission.

They also criticized the environmental impacts of the measure, noting it reprioritizes water uses so that conservation purposes take a back seat to all other uses.

“The ‘water grab’ initiative erases the environment from ‘beneficial uses’ of water in California,” says Jay Ziegler, Director of Policy and External Affairs for The Nature Conservancy. “I believe most Californians would be shocked to discover that this initiative is a license to drain streams and rivers and the fish and wildlife that come with them. From the Klamath River to the Colorado, California’s rivers define the great diversity of California’s geography and our people. Losing our rivers to the narrow benefit of a few would rob future generations of Californians.”

"This effort is ill-founded and ill-directed," said Sen. Jim Nielsen, R-Gerber. "It will delay the start of Sites and Temperance Flat Reservoirs, and make long-settled water rights provisions vulnerable to lawsuits. There is strong and wide opposition in agriculture."

Added Assemblymember James Gallagher (R-Plumas Lake): Voters should beware. Though I would like to see money diverted from high speed rail to water storage, this deceptive initiative would jeopardize property rights and delay vital water storage projects. Don't sign the petition."

The ballot measure, sponsored by the California Water Alliance, a San Joaquin Valley group of large water users, has yet to secure 25 percent of the 585,407 qualified signatures required by June to be on the November ballot. Still, said opponents, they are taking the measure seriously because of its far-reaching consequences.

For more information, visit www.StoptheWaterGrab.com.

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