

Opinion: Endangered Species Act creating false drought for farmers

By John Harris

Higher crop prices, an increase in acres and more water helped boost Kings County's overall crop value to \$1.7 billion in 2010, an increase of 30 percent over the previous year.

As a farmer and rancher gravely concerned with the health of agriculture in California – and as a citizen who wants a strong recovery for our state's recession-burdened economy – I've enjoyed reading the precipitation surveys out of the Sierra this year.

Snow depths were more than twice the long-term average at some measuring stations, and reservoirs are brimming.

As a result, there has been a pronounced short-term change in outlook for farmers and communities that were seared by a three-year drought. More acres are being planted, more workers are being hired, more farm machinery is being purchased, and a world-class food supply is being produced.

As the *Wall Street Journal* reported recently, "California's farm economy is on the rebound."

Just one acre of vegetable production in my area can generate more than \$5,000 in incremental jobs. My on-farm payroll has gone up \$4 million over the past year. Local businesses, such as car dealers, have seen their sales soar. This shows that if the farm economy has money, it will be spent and help grow the economy.

However, while we are all thrilled by the dramatic turnaround in water supply, there are justified fears about future years.

Although the natural drought has ended, we're still faced with harmful regulatory barriers to getting the needed water to those who grow the food and provide the stimulus our economy needs.

Most of the regulatory restrictions are part of a misguided federal scheme to help fish on the Endangered Species Act list. The cutbacks in pumping from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta were based on federal "biological opinions" that too often involved junk science, as Fresno-based U.S. District Judge Oliver Wanger found.

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