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NEGATIVE PHILOSOPHY / OPENING QUOTES

Searching for “villains” to blame for water shortages will set back the search for real solutions

Ellen Hanak, Dr. Jay Lund, Dr. Ariel Dinar, Prof. Brian Gray, Prof. Richard Howitt, Prof. Jeffrey Mount, Prof. Peter Moyle and Prof. Barton “Buzz” Thompson 2009 (Hanak – senior fellow at Public Policy Institute of California. Lund – PhD, professor in Dept of Engineering at Univ. of California-Davis. Dinar – PhD, professor of Environmental Economics & Policy. Gray – J.D. from Univ of Calif.-Berkeley; adjunct fellow at the PPIC Water Policy Center and professor emeritus at theUniversity of California. Howitt - professor emeritus of agricultural and resource economics, Univ. of Calif-Davis. Mount - senior fellow at the PPIC Water Policy Center; emeritus professor at UCDavis in the Dept of Earth and Planetary Sciences. Moyle – Distinguished Professor Emeritus in the Dept of Wildlife, Fish and Conservation Biology and associate director of the Center for Watershed Sciences at Univ of Calif.-Davis. Thomspon – professor of natural resources law at Stanford Univ.) 23 Oct 2009 “Myths of California Water: Implications and Reality” <http://www.ppic.org/main/publication.asp?i=918>

There are no true villains in California water policy. Responsibility for water problems must be shared by all water users, and fundamentally results from having a vibrant economy and society in an arid climate. Villains are always someone else. Though rhetorically convenient, attempts to vilify one group of water users for California’s diverse water problems are factually incorrect and get in the way of more productive policy discussions.

Why do farms consume so much water? Because people like to eat

Julie Murphree 2015 (Communication Director for Arizona Farm Bureau) 12 Aug 2015 “Arizona Agriculture is your Water Conservationist” <http://info.azfb.org/blog/arizona-agriculture-is-your-water-conservationist>

We’ve been writing about water and Arizona agriculture for several years now. Often, we get questions from the public on our industries’ use of water. Like, “Why do you use so much?” When I hear that I am tempted to say, “Why do you eat so much?”

INHERENCY

1. Status Quo trends and policies will solve

With Status Quo trends and options, California will be able to adapt to water scarcity

Ellen Hanak, Dr. Jay Lund, Dr. Ariel Dinar, Prof. Brian Gray, Prof. Richard Howitt, Prof. Jeffrey Mount, Prof. Peter Moyle and Prof. Barton “Buzz” Thompson 2009 (Hanak – senior fellow at Public Policy Institute of California. Lund – PhD, professor in Dept of Engineering at Univ. of California-Davis. Dinar – PhD, professor of Environmental Economics & Policy. Gray – J.D. from Univ of Calif.-Berkeley; adjunct fellow at the PPIC Water Policy Center and professor emeritus at theUniversity of California. Howitt - professor emeritus of agricultural and resource economics, Univ. of Calif-Davis. Mount - senior fellow at the PPIC Water Policy Center; emeritus professor at UCDavis in the Dept of Earth and Planetary Sciences. Moyle – Distinguished Professor Emeritus in the Dept of Wildlife, Fish and Conservation Biology and associate director of the Center for Watershed Sciences at Univ of Calif.-Davis. Thomspon – professor of natural resources law at Stanford Univ.) 23 Oct 2009 “Myths of California Water: Implications and Reality” <http://www.ppic.org/main/publication.asp?i=918>

Various studies suggest considerable scope for future adaptations to scarcity, including further gains in water use efficiency, changing operating schedules for water stored and released from reservoirs (reservoir “reoperation”), improvements in conjunctive use and recycling, and some additional reallocation across sectors through water marketing (Department of Water Resources, 2009a; Jenkins, et al., 2003; Tanaka, et al., 2006; Zilberman, et al., 1993). Although climate change may significantly reduce water availability and growth in farm revenues, California agriculture appears able to adapt without declines in revenues from today’s levels, thanks to projected improvements in irrigation and crop production technology and demand growth for higher value crops.

Half of California’s agricultural land will be gone in 40 years under current policies

Prof. David Pimentel & Marcia Pimentel 2008. (David – professor at College of Agriculture & Life Sciences, Cornell Univ. Marcia - Senior Lecturer (retired), Division of Nutritional Sciences in the College of Human Ecology at Cornell) 2 June 2008 “Rapid Population Growth in California: A Threat to Land and Food Production” <http://www.populationmedia.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/10/david-pimentel-rapid-population-growth-in-california.doc>

Projections are that in about 60 years, per capita land in California will be reduced to approximately half of what it is today. Along with decreased land and increased demand for food, food prices are expected to increase 50% to 100% above current prices. As the California population continues to increase, in about 40 years approximately half of California’s agricultural land will no longer be available for production.

2. Conservation of agricultural water underway

Federal irrigation water in California has been cut

Kirk Siegler 2015 (journalist) “California Farmers Gulp Most Of State's Water, But Say They've Cut Back” 7 Apr 2015 NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO <http://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2015/04/07/398106067/calif-s-farmers-gulp-most-of-states-water-but-say-theyve-cut-back>

When Gov. Jerry Brown [announced the largest mandatory water restrictions in California history](http://www.npr.org/2015/04/01/396871398/california-governor-announces-first-ever-mandatory-water-restrictions) April 1 while standing in a snowless field in the Sierra Nevada, he gave hardly a mention to farms. When reporters asked about farmers later, Brown replied that they already are making sacrifices. After all, this is the second straight year that most will get no federal or state irrigation water because of [paltry Sierra Nevada snowpacks](http://www.npr.org/blogs/thesalt/2015/04/01/396780035/scary-times-for-california-farmers-as-snowpack-hits-record-lows). "Agriculture has already suffered major cutbacks," Brown added. "A lot of people are letting their land go fallow, trees are dying — so farmers have been hit very hard."

“Farmers consume 80% of the water” statistic is misleading. Farmers’ water is being completely cut off

Kirk Siegler 2015 (journalist) “California Farmers Gulp Most Of State's Water, But Say They've Cut Back” 7 Apr 2015 NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO <http://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2015/04/07/398106067/calif-s-farmers-gulp-most-of-states-water-but-say-theyve-cut-back>

Each year farms in this state gulp down as much as four times the amount of water consumed by cities and towns. But that [oft-cited statistic](http://www.ppic.org/main/publication_show.asp?i=1108) may not always reflect reality, especially in a year like this, according to farm groups. "Farmers in the San Joaquin Valley have been the only ones to have their water actually completely cut off," said [Dave Puglia](http://www.wga.com/staff/dave-puglia), senior vice president with the Western Growers Association. Puglia likens the "zero percent allocations of water" that most of his growers will get to the ultimate kind of forced water conservation. "I don't know how you can ask farmers to conserve more than zero," he says.

New trends show California water usage is declining

*Josué Medellín-Azuara, Jay Lund and Richard Howitt 2015 (all are with the UC Davis Center for Watershed Sciences. Medellín-Azuara is a research scientist, Howitt is a professor emeritus of agricultural and resource economics, and Lund is a professor of civil and environmental engineering and director of the center) 28 Apr 2015 “*[Jobs per drop irrigating California crops](https://californiawaterblog.com/2015/04/28/jobs-per-drop-irrigating-california-crops/)” <https://californiawaterblog.com/2015/04/28/jobs-per-drop-irrigating-california-crops/>

California agriculture will use less water this year and in the long run. Several factors will lead to long-term reductions in farm water use in many areas of the state. Those include the state’s new groundwater legislation, ongoing salinization and urbanization of cropland, and increasing environmental water requirements.

California has made considerable gains in water efficiency

Ellen Hanak, Dr. Jay Lund, Dr. Ariel Dinar, Prof. Brian Gray, Prof. Richard Howitt, Prof. Jeffrey Mount, Prof. Peter Moyle and Prof. Barton “Buzz” Thompson 2009 (Hanak – senior fellow at Public Policy Institute of California. Lund – PhD, professor in Dept of Engineering at Univ. of California-Davis. Dinar – PhD, professor of Environmental Economics & Policy. Gray – J.D. from Univ of Calif.-Berkeley; adjunct fellow at the PPIC Water Policy Center and professor emeritus at theUniversity of California. Howitt - professor emeritus of agricultural and resource economics, Univ. of Calif-Davis. Mount - senior fellow at the PPIC Water Policy Center; emeritus professor at UCDavis in the Dept of Earth and Planetary Sciences. Moyle – Distinguished Professor Emeritus in the Dept of Wildlife, Fish and Conservation Biology and associate director of the Center for Watershed Sciences at Univ of Calif.-Davis. Thomspon – professor of natural resources law at Stanford Univ.) 23 Oct 2009 “Myths of California Water: Implications and Reality” <http://www.ppic.org/main/publication.asp?i=918>

In response to scarcity, Californians have made considerable gains in water use efficiency. A driving force for improving the economic efficiency of irrigation is the steady increase in crop yields per acre. Over the last four decades, California’s crop yields have increased at an average rate of 1.42% per year (Brunke, Howitt, and Sumner, 2005). As farmers have shifted to higher value horticultural and orchard crops, they have adopted more efficient irrigation technologies.

Arizona is no sponge: Farmers pay for water and work hard to conserve it

Ed Martin 2015 (Maricopa County, Arizona, Extension Director) quoted by Julie Murphree, Communication Director for Arizona Farm Bureau, 12 Aug 2015 “Arizona Agriculture is your Water Conservationist” <http://info.azfb.org/blog/arizona-agriculture-is-your-water-conservationist>

In addition, agricultural producers do not get water for free, they pay for it.  In my 20-plus years of working with crop growers in Arizona I haven’t met one that was indifferent to water conservation.  All of them were looking for ways to reduce their irrigation applications, get the most out of every drop and maintain the environmental integrity of their fields.  Arizona agricultural producers continue to make great strides in applying the latest in technology to assure they are applying water in the most economic and efficient manner possible. I also like the idea of buying from Arizona producers – I look for their labels in the market.  I know these growers are using the very latest in technology and food safety techniques. I have no idea what growers do in other countries – I buy local whenever possible and I’m thankful I have the opportunity to do it.  Arizona agriculture is a lot of things, but I’m afraid a sponge isn’t one of them.”

Arizona farms are very water efficient and constantly improving water technology

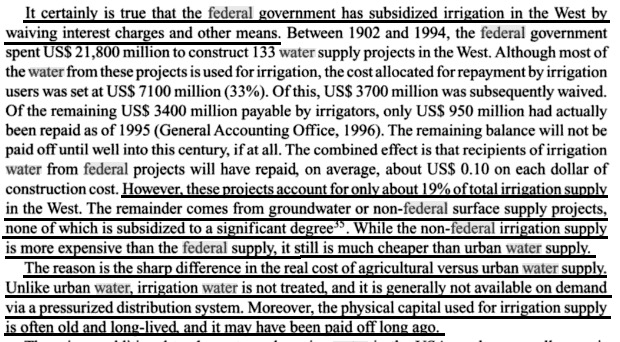
Bryan Hartman 2015 (Arizona farmer; Director of the Maricopa Economic Development Alliance and a principal of the Santa Cruz Ranch Partnership) 5 Aug 2015 [A Conversation about Water Strategy in Pinal County: Bryan Hartman](http://info.azfb.org/blog/a-conversation-about-water-strategy-in-pinal-county-bryan-hartman) <http://info.azfb.org/blog/a-conversation-about-water-strategy-in-pinal-county-bryan-hartman>

In Arizona, agriculture is very efficient in water use and management. We were some of the first in the country to use land leveling technology for basin irrigation, a technology that dramatically reduced water use per acre. And, where most appropriate putting in drip, pivots and any other technologies that allow us to make the use of water more efficient. Arizona’s climate allows us to be some of the highest producing farmers on the globe.

3. Subsidies aren’t significant – farmers are mostly paying for their water

Only 19% of Western agricultural water is federally subsidized. The rest is “cheap” for other, quite valid, reasons

Dr. W. M. Hanemann 2004 (PhD economics) WATER CRISIS: MYTH OR REALITY <https://books.google.com/books?id=zXThrKaavjcC&pg=PA77&lpg=PA77&dq=federal+water+agriculture+subsidies+myth&source=bl&ots=1sSop9Maot&sig=SntNPAA1rQNsfSNUngyfEQjZCNQ&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjVrtPn-YzNAhXEZiYKHei_AR44ChDoAQgeMAE#v=onepage&q=federal%20water%20agriculture%20subsidies%20myth&f=false>



Most California farmers are paying the actual unsubsidized cost of their water

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Most farmers in California pay the actual operating cost of bringing the water to their farms (even if they - like other water users - generally do not pay the external environmental costs from reduced steam flows). Water delivered to farmers from the State Water Project, local water projects, and the Colorado River Project is essentially unsubsidized. In addition to its subsidized contractors, the CVP also delivers over 2 million acre-feet to “settlement” and “exchange” contractors, who were already receiving the water prior to the CVP, at very low (but not subsidized) prices.

California farmers are paying prices much higher than the subsidized price for water

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Since the 1992 passage of the CVPIA, CVP contractors south of the Delta have received reduced deliveries in most years, as part of a mitigation program to provide more flows for salmon. Recent regulatory actions to protect the delta smelt have led to further reductions (see Villain #3 and Figure 5). Many of these farmers are now making cropping decisions based on the (much higher) price of water they can obtain on the water market, rather than the price of water delivered by the CVP. Since the early 1990s, farmers have routinely paid more than $100 per acre-foot to purchase supplemental water, and in the 2008 and 2009 seasons, when cutbacks were severe, some farmers on the west side of the San Joaquin Valley were paying as much as $500 per acre-foot for supplemental water (authors’ communications with farmers and water brokers). In contrast, contract prices for CVP water on the west side run from $25 to $65 per acre-foot.

Most of today’s farmers have paid for the subsidy

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The view of subsidized farmers as water villains is based on misunderstandings of the role of these subsidies in today’s farm economy. First, the claims of unfairness are unjustified, because most of today’s farmers have already paid for the subsidy through higher land prices: land eligible for subsidized water is more expensive (Huffaker and Gardner, 1986).

Arizona farm water for the most part isn’t subsidized

*Joe Sigg 2015(Arizona Farm Bureau* Government Relations Director) [Myths Dispelled about Arizona Agriculture; Agriculture in General](http://info.azfb.org/blog/myths-dispelled-about-arizona-agriculture-agriculture-in-general) <http://info.azfb.org/blog/myths-dispelled-about-arizona-agriculture-agriculture-in-general>

There has been a lot of water stored and put to beneficial and productive use since the Reclamation Act of 1902; all of it designed to help populate and grow the west and southwest. Part of it was to encourage and incentivize agriculture. There have been a myriad of promises, arrangements and contracts to facilitate this, and to insure that Arizona took its full contact right from the Colorado River. Fast forward to today, there are no federal supports for groundwater pumping in most parts of the state. There are Tribal and non-tribal projects for the delivery of water to agriculture, and there is no one specific answer as to federal supports. For example, if a project is paid for as in southwestern Arizona, about the only advantage is for an organized district to receive power at cost and access to some federal financing for infrastructures. In central Arizona, agriculture is only a short term placeholder for municipal and industrial interests until 2030, and there are certain understandings in place to secure that. Yes, the federal government is involved in support of infrastructures that provide water to ***all***of the southwest, but for the most part, taken in totality across the state, irrigation water to farmers is no more subsidized than water to your tap or to your gas at the pump.

HARMS / SIGNIFICANCE

Agriculture is not a “bad” use of water. Lawns don’t feed people

Kirk Siegler 2015 (journalist) “California Farmers Gulp Most Of State's Water, But Say They've Cut Back” 7 Apr 2015 NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO <http://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2015/04/07/398106067/calif-s-farmers-gulp-most-of-states-water-but-say-theyve-cut-back>

 Indeed, the industry is quick to point out that California now produces the bulk of the country's fresh food supply, including lettuce, broccoli, tomatoes and, yes, nuts. For people like Dan Macon, who raises sheep near Auburn, Calif., it comes down to the question of what the best use of limited water is. Borrowing a line from the governor this week, Macon said that lawns don't feed people. "We have to have some hard discussions about what types of water use we're doing," Macon added.

Eliminating water subsidies isn’t needed to encourage conservation

Ellen Hanak, Dr. Jay Lund, Dr. Ariel Dinar, Prof. Brian Gray, Prof. Richard Howitt, Prof. Jeffrey Mount, Prof. Peter Moyle and Prof. Barton “Buzz” Thompson 2009 (Hanak – senior fellow at Public Policy Institute of California. Lund – PhD, professor in Dept of Engineering at Univ. of California-Davis. Dinar – PhD, professor of Environmental Economics & Policy. Gray – J.D. from Univ of Calif.-Berkeley; adjunct fellow at the PPIC Water Policy Center and professor emeritus at theUniversity of California. Howitt - professor emeritus of agricultural and resource economics, Univ. of Calif-Davis. Mount - senior fellow at the PPIC Water Policy Center; emeritus professor at UCDavis in the Dept of Earth and Planetary Sciences. Moyle – Distinguished Professor Emeritus in the Dept of Wildlife, Fish and Conservation Biology and associate director of the Center for Watershed Sciences at Univ of Calif.-Davis. Thomspon – professor of natural resources law at Stanford Univ.) 23 Oct 2009 “Myths of California Water: Implications and Reality” <http://www.ppic.org/main/publication.asp?i=918>

Second, eliminating water subsidies is not the only way to encourage farmers to conserve water. As noted above (Running out of water myth), the economic efficiency of agricultural water use in California has increased steadily due to gains in crop yields, switches to higher value crops, and increases in irrigation efficiency. Since the early 1990s, water scarcity has driven efficiency improvements among CVP farmers south of the Delta as they seek to adjust to shortages from drought and regulatory changes.

Exporting crops isn’t a problem: we import from those countries too

Julie Murphree 2015 (Communication Director for Arizona Farm Bureau) 12 Aug 2015 “Arizona Agriculture is your Water Conservationist” <http://info.azfb.org/blog/arizona-agriculture-is-your-water-conservationist>

If we are growing enough hay and cotton to export so much to other countries, do we really have a water shortage? I’ll let a farmer that annually has to plan out his business answer this one. “Economies in the world are very much dependent on one another,” says Dan Thelander, a cotton wheat and alfalfa farmer in Pinal County.  “Arizona grows high quality alfalfa and cotton very well and does export some of it to other countries.  We in turn import food and other products from these and other countries. Many of these places have a scarcity of water also. “The answer is not to limit exports, but to continue to be as efficient as possible with the water used.”

SOLVENCY

1. Water markets won’t solve

Markets alone don’t produce water and they have to be integrated into a large set of other solutions

Ellen Hanak, Dr. Jay Lund, Dr. Ariel Dinar, Prof. Brian Gray, Prof. Richard Howitt, Prof. Jeffrey Mount, Prof. Peter Moyle and Prof. Barton “Buzz” Thompson 2009 (Hanak – senior fellow at Public Policy Institute of California. Lund – PhD, professor in Dept of Engineering at Univ. of California-Davis. Dinar – PhD, professor of Environmental Economics & Policy. Gray – J.D. from Univ of Calif.-Berkeley; adjunct fellow at the PPIC Water Policy Center and professor emeritus at theUniversity of California. Howitt - professor emeritus of agricultural and resource economics, Univ. of Calif-Davis. Mount - senior fellow at the PPIC Water Policy Center; emeritus professor at UCDavis in the Dept of Earth and Planetary Sciences. Moyle – Distinguished Professor Emeritus in the Dept of Wildlife, Fish and Conservation Biology and associate director of the Center for Watershed Sciences at Univ of Calif.-Davis. Thomspon – professor of natural resources law at Stanford Univ.) 23 Oct 2009 “Myths of California Water: Implications and Reality” <http://www.ppic.org/main/publication.asp?i=918>

Water markets provide important incentives for cooperation and coordination of a portfolio of water management activities. Markets alone do not produce water. Water markets often become more economically and environmentally effective when coordinated with other water management actions (Pulido, et al., 2004; Jenkins, et al., 2004) and rely on well established property rights for water that allow for market transactions. Instead of seeking salvation from a single solution, a portfolio approach, orchestrating a wide range of management actions including conservation, water markets, underground storage, and new infrastructure, is much more likely to be successful in addressing California’s complex, locally varied, and evolving water problems (Jenkins, et al., 2004).

DISADVANTAGES

1. Dollars and jobs

Link: Water = dollars and jobs in agriculture

*Josué Medellín-Azuara, Jay Lund and Richard Howitt 2015 (all are with the UC Davis Center for Watershed Sciences. Medellín-Azuara is a research scientist, Howitt is a professor emeritus of agricultural and resource economics, and Lund is a professor of civil and environmental engineering and director of the center) 28 Apr 2015 “*Jobs per drop irrigating California crops” <https://californiawaterblog.com/2015/04/28/jobs-per-drop-irrigating-california-crops/>

Some of the most popular drought stories lately have been on the amount of what water needed to produce food from California, as a consumer sees it — a single almond, a head of lettuce or a glass of wine. The stories are often illustrated with pictures of common fruits, nuts and vegetables in one column and icons of gallon water jugs representing their water usage in the other. But there are more than two columns to this story. The amount of water applied to crops also translates into dollars and jobs — the main reasons for agriculture’s existence in California.

Impact: 400,000 Jobs in California

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California agriculture accounts for about 400,000 full-time jobs (or their equivalent), including 172,000 in crop production, 29,000 in livestock and dairies and 193,000 in agricultural support services (contract labor). Some studies suggest that many California farm jobs  are part-time, with an average of two jobs for each full-time equivalent job.

Impact: $17 billion and 88,000 jobs in Arizona

Julie Murphree 2015 (Communication Director for Arizona Farm Bureau) 12 Aug 2015 “Arizona Agriculture is your Water Conservationist” <http://info.azfb.org/blog/arizona-agriculture-is-your-water-conservationist>

How much of an impact is $17 billion dollars anyway? Well, as they say, "it ain’t chicken feed," that’s for sure.  This number is based on a study titled “[Agriculture in Arizona’s Economy: An Economic Contribution Analysis](http://www.azfb.org/f/71db4e85-0dd1-41e5-82a6-da8d8da6eb84/az-ag-contribution-analysis-2014)”, by Ashley Kerna and George Frisvold, Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics, Cooperative Extension, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, University of Arizona. In their study, they found that there are more than 20,000 farms and ranches in Arizona that manage roughly three-quarters of the state’s total land area and much of this land, by the way, produces two thirds of the water Phoenix uses.   Based on data from the 2011 production year, the contribution of Arizona’s agribusiness system to state output (sales) was $17.1 billion (valued in 2014 dollars). This figure includes direct effects as well as the indirect and induced multiplier effects. Agribusiness’s total contribution to Arizona’s state gross domestic product (GDP) was $7.3 billion (valued in 2014 dollars).  More than 88,000 full- and part-time jobs were supported by Arizona’s agribusiness system.  While nearly 50,000 of these were jobs within agriculture and its supporting industries, an estimated 38,000 additional jobs were supported in non-agricultural sectors. Every 100 jobs in the agribusiness system support an additional 78 jobs in other industries in Arizona.  That’s what $17.1 billion is, jobs for Arizona.

2. More study needed

We don’t have enough information yet to formulate a comprehensive water solution for California, and acting too quickly will make things worse

Ellen Hanak, Dr. Jay Lund, Dr. Ariel Dinar, Prof. Brian Gray, Prof. Richard Howitt, Prof. Jeffrey Mount, Prof. Peter Moyle and Prof. Barton “Buzz” Thompson 2009 (Hanak – senior fellow at Public Policy Institute of California. Lund – PhD, professor in Dept of Engineering at Univ. of California-Davis. Dinar – PhD, professor of Environmental Economics & Policy. Gray – J.D. from Univ of Calif.-Berkeley; adjunct fellow at the PPIC Water Policy Center and professor emeritus at theUniversity of California. Howitt - professor emeritus of agricultural and resource economics, Univ. of Calif-Davis. Mount - senior fellow at the PPIC Water Policy Center; emeritus professor at UCDavis in the Dept of Earth and Planetary Sciences. Moyle – Distinguished Professor Emeritus in the Dept of Wildlife, Fish and Conservation Biology and associate director of the Center for Watershed Sciences at Univ of Calif.-Davis. Thomspon – professor of natural resources law at Stanford Univ.) 23 Oct 2009 “Myths of California Water: Implications and Reality” <http://www.ppic.org/main/publication.asp?i=918>

Policy decisions will be most effective in addressing water management goals if they are based on an accurate understanding of the state’s water problems and potential solutions. Unfortunately, California currently possesses little systematic technical knowledge and coordinated research capability to support and advance policy discussions and decisions. In part, this information deficit stems from the highly decentralized nature of water management. More than a thousand local and regional water agencies are responsible for water delivery, wastewater treatment, and flood control, alongside many state and federal agencies. Decentralized management has facilitated responsiveness to local problems, but it also has fragmented much of the detailed knowledge and strategic perspectives on California’s vast water system. The state, for its part, with few resources and many competing pressures, requires little reporting of information from the field and devotes few resources to technical decision support and synthesis, monitoring of water use, and enforcement of water rights. As a result, misperceptions - or myths - about California’s water problems and solutions abound among the public, policymakers, and even many water professionals. These myths - often used to support particular stakeholder interests - confuse public policy discussions, legislative debates, and water management decisions, making them less productive and useful than they need to be for California’s water system to respond effectively to its mounting challenges.

3. Masking the problem by misdirecting the blame

Misdirecting the blame at a “villain” – like the farmer with subsidized water – makes the problem harder to solve

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One of the most common myths about California water is that some Villain is preventing the state from meeting its water demands. Eliminating or reforming that villain would solve California’s water problems. Call it the “Chinatown Myth” in honor of the evil Noah Cross who was stealing the water from beneath people’s noses, creating artificial shortages. A good villain is always rhetorically useful and makes problems seem easier to solve. Everyone in California has a favorite real-world water villain. Common favorites are the wasteful Southern California homeowner, the farmer who receives federally subsidized water, and the state and federal Endangered Species Acts. The danger with villains is that they can lead to inaction. Everyone points the finger at someone else, rather than recognizing that we all need to change our water ways.

4. Fairness violation

It’s not fair to eliminate subsidies for farmers who were told they would receive them when they purchased the land

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The view of subsidized farmers as water villains is based on misunderstandings of the role of these subsidies in today’s farm economy. First, the claims of unfairness are unjustified, because most of today’s farmers have already paid for the subsidy through higher land prices: land eligible for subsidized water is more expensive (Huffaker and Gardner, 1986). Although the windfall to original landowners might have been unfair, current owners are receiving what the United States government led them to expect they would receive when they purchased this land. Fairness might imply locating the original landowners and stripping them of their windfall, but it is difficult to argue that stripping current farmers of the subsidy is “fair.”