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ENVIRONMENT

Lawsuit filed over 10-year water transfer review

By Heather Hacking

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CHICO >> For at least a dozen years, Barbara Vlamis has said that water transfers that happen year after- year can't be called onetime events. Transfers should be looked at cumulatively; environmental review taking into account the overall impacts on the environment, the leader of AquAlliance has maintained.

Her Chico- based water advocacy group filed a lawsuit this week against the U. S. Bureau of Reclamation and the San Luis Delta Mendota Water Authority, stating that a recently completed 10- year water transfer review was inadequate, ignored relevant information and does not meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act.

[**AquaAlliance.net**](#) is joined in the lawsuit by California Sportfishing Protection Alliance, Central Delta Water Agency, Local Agencies of the North Delta and South Delta Water Agency.

This is the third lawsuit on the same topic since 2011.

The first two challenged a lower level of environmental review for the plan that looks at water transfers of up to 600,000 acre- feet of water a year, each year for the next 10 years. The transfers could be from water agencies in Northern California to water agencies south of the Sacramento- San Joaquin Delta and in the San Francisco Bay Area. See documents here: <http://www.usbr.gov/mp/cvp/> ltwt The plan does not mean those transfer will take place, just that they could. If groups applied to transfer water, they could use the 10- year document to satisfy environmental review, Vlamis explained.

One goal of the most recent lawsuit is to “force the agencies to regroup” and more honestly disclose the impacts of the proposed water transfers.

An environmental review “forces them to disclose what they do and don’t know. It is very obvious that they don’t know a lot. That’s why the public was so outraged by the shoddy review,” during a meeting in Chico last October.

Vlamis said she and her coalition is considering filing an injunction, to stop water transfers this year based on the plan. However, that legal step would need to be done soon to beat the July 1 water transfer season.

County complaint

In early December, the Butte County Board of Supervisors sent off a long and reproachful letter, calling the plan “ seriously flawed and will need to be revised.”

County officials stated that the data used for the environmental review was “outdated, incomplete and selectively chosen.”

Lack of disclosure

As a water activist, Vlamis spends a lot of time asking for public documents, filing information requests and scouring government websites for water details.

Throughout the decades, she has been continuously frustrated by how difficult it is to get information on water transfers, she said.

“I have filed Freedom of Information Act requests and Public Records Act requests,” she said.

She said there is no reason why the state and federal agencies could not provide a consolidated spreadsheet of water transfers each year, and post it to a website that could be easily viewed by the public.

“But it sure isn’t there.”

To read the lawsuit: <https://goo.gl/1uVcyJ>

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