

Love Letters From the California Water Board

The government tyrants in California are making their move to destroy agriculture in far-northern California. It's no joke, but... sometimes humor is the best way to handle aspiring dictators.

By Folks Unknown Who Know

Editor's note: The following was passed on to RANGE from a source in California who wishes to remain anonymous. This rancher is directly affected by new draconian "drought emergency" regulations created by Gov. Gavin Newsom's administration. While the below "correspondence" is obviously parody, the factual content, unfortunately, is true.

Before the "love letters," a little background. In May 2021, Gov. Newsom declared a drought emergency for most of California and directed the State Water Resources Control Board (Water Board) to determine "minimum instream flows" necessary to protect fish in the Klamath and Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta watersheds. The proclamation directed the Water Board to encourage "voluntary actions" to reach those flow levels. It also directed the Water Board to "consider regulations" if voluntary actions were found to be "insufficient." But in the Klamath watershed, instead of toying around with "voluntary measures," the Water Board went straight to drafting regulations. In September, the agency dropped the hammer on two small agricultural valleys in far-northern California, shutting off farmers' and ranchers' water—both surface and groundwater. Until Newsom lifts the drought proclamation, the regulations stand—as does the threat of legal actions and fines.

Scott Valley, which got the harshest regulations, is a beautiful mountain valley where hay and cows are the mainstays. Snowmelt recharges the valley's streams and groundwater each year. Of note: the valley's aquifer has remained stable since the 1960s, according to monitoring by UC Davis hydrologists. Farming and ranching have carried on, and the "sensitive" fish species are doing quite well, too. Coho salmon returns have increased over the past 20 years, and Chinook returns have remained relatively stable since counting began in the 1970s. But instead of accolades, Scott Valley just got the guillotine.

Praying for lots of snow this winter is the only thing standing between beautiful Scott

Valley's long farming and ranching tradition and ruin (or revolt?).

Now for some fun. Nothing like poking fun at those who would be God.

Sept 10, 2021 . From California State Water Resources Control Board

Dear farmers & ranchers in Scott and Shasta: We understand how hard this year's drought has been on all of you, and we care immensely. Unfortunately for you, however, we care



"Whoa, Hoss! Of all the wrecks we been in together...who woulda thunk a fish would finally do us in!"

mostly about fish. Ha ha! But, seriously, that is why we are asking you (well, telling you, really!) to please turn off your irrigation pumps and all diversions until one of the following occurs:

(a) Gov. Newsom's drought proclamation is lifted (mind you, the drought proclamation applies to 41 counties up and down the state—so you'd better pray for rain for the whole state!);

(b) Flows in the Scott or Shasta rivers reach the freakishly high levels we are asking for in this document (we realize these levels are hard to reach even on an average year and are really much higher than the fish need—but we care so much, we just had to ask for these levels, you understand!); or

(c) You write a \$1,000 check (minimum)

to the "Reelect Gov. Newsom campaign." Ha ha, that was a joke. But seriously, you will be writing a check of \$1,000 per day if you choose to violate these curtailment orders.

Anyways, what else? Oh, you're probably wondering what to do about your cattle, sheep, horses, etc. We are generously allowing them to continue to drink, but it can't be out of a leaky ditch. That's pretty much any ditch that isn't lined. So good luck replacing all your ditches! Also, make sure your horses and cows don't drink more than 15 gallons per day. And remember to file a petition to let them drink. And remember that little \$1,000-per-day fine thingy! And no, just because we're letting them drink doesn't mean we're letting you have enough water to also provide them grass.

Oh, and if the curtailment thingy gets lifted, we still can't have those livestock drinking out of leaky ditches between September and January. See, the little fishes need *alllll* the

water they can get during that critical period, so we gotta keep that water in the stream, not recharging the groundwater the way you silly ranchers normally like to try and do in winter.

One other thing. Once the river flows are at a super-comfy level for the fish and you're allowed to irrigate again, we're gonna need you to cut back your total water usage by 30 percent in Scott Valley and 15 percent in Shasta Valley. (Doesn't that make you Scott guys a little mad at the Shasta guys? Not to try to cause any rifts

between you! Ha ha).

Let's see...oh, we forgot to bring up the reporting thing. Pretty please, log in to our online portal and report *all* your water sources and estimated usage. Failure to do so could result in, shall we say, \$500 per day of violation? Does that sound okay? (We take that as a "Yes!" Ha ha!)

OK, enough horsing around. (You'll probably be done with horses by the time you're finished with this letter. Get it?) So anyways, please check out the attached chart showing the monthly water levels we're requiring in the Scott and Shasta rivers. We know what you're thinking, those flow levels seem a little high. If you think it's weird that we're asking for summer flow levels that are hard to reach even on an average year, it's not weird. You

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would ask for those levels, too, if you cared about fish as much as we do. Sure, the fish only need seven cfs [cubic feet per second] to make it up the streambed (not 40). But hey, what can we say, we're overachievers!

Caringly,

Your State Water Resources Control Board P.S.: We really hope you don't mind us using the stick instead of the carrot. Carrots just take too much water to grow! P.P.S.: Keep your eyes peeled for future letters about the curtailment.

Oct. 25, 2021 . From your Buddies at the California State Water Resources Control Board

Dear farmers & ranchers in Scott and Shasta: Us again! Did you miss us? Ha ha. Good news! We are "conditionally and temporarily" lifting the curtailment! So you can go ahead and irrigate. Just remember, not with leaky ditches! And remember to reduce by 30 and 15 percent, respectively :-).

If you're wondering about whether to plant any fields this coming spring, we say go for it! We can't guarantee you'll be allowed to water them, though. Flow levels in your rivers typically drop below our required amount around June-ish, so that would mean hello curtailments again! Sorry, rules is rules. (P.S.: You guys up there in NorCal really shouldn't have led the charge on that whole "Recall Newsom" thing. You know what they say, take a shot at the king and miss...and he'll institute a water curtailment!)

On another note, we have been hearing a lot of complaining about how we issued this curtailment right when your county was about to implement its own groundwater sustainability plan (which the state imposed on it, hehe). We're getting lots of whiny letters like, "Why did you guys pull the rug out from under our efforts to design a plan that increases river flows without doing harm to our farmers and ranchers" and "One size does not fit all." Stuff like that. Thank you for your inputs, we really appreciate all this collaboration! Keep sending those letters! We believe it's therapeutic for you to express yourself. (And it's therapeutic for us to do whatever we want! Ha ha.)

Another thing you guys keep bringing up is "Why won't the California Fish & Wildlife Department talk about how great our coho and Chinook salmon numbers have actually been in recent years?" Some of you complainers are saying you're producing a lot of fish, but you shouldn't be held responsible if low numbers of fish return to your watershed due

to factors beyond your control, like sea lion depredation and commercial fishing and stuff like that. Some of you are even asking how many fish is "enough" fish. Hey, we don't like to pin numbers to things. We say we can always do better! Try to be team players, guys.

"Our constitutional right to property" is another line we keep getting. How old school is that? Where do you guys live, the 19th century? Please, don't make us laugh!

Also, not to sound critical, but some of you have been sending in some super-sciency, super-boring comments like "Our coho num-



"Sorry, Hoss. State Water Board says that's all ya get! Too bad they didn't allow water to grow grass for ya..."

bers are actually increasing, and last year we had 1,671 adult returns—an increase of 3.5 times from the previous brood year," and "We haven't met your October flow levels (40 cfs) for seven of the past 13 years, yet our Chinook returns even in those dry years have been over 50 percent. Last year we had only seven cfs mean flow in October, yet we got 31 percent Chinook returns!" Wow, throwing around statistics now? What a yawner.

Stats are almost as bad as when you use terms like "oceanic decadal oscillation" and try to explain how it's a cyclical thing about ocean temperatures and how the fish are found in great multitudes farther north and how you guys are at the southernmost reaches of the range of the Chinook and coho and blah blah blah.... Oh, we're sorry, we fell asleep! *Soooo boring*. Come on guys, read your audience!

Some of you have been keeping your sense of humor, though, and we're glad to see that. One guy wrote to ask if we'd be going on a 30 percent diet since we're telling you farmer/rancher types to cut back your water use (and thereby your production of food) by 30 percent. That was rich! Keep the jokes coming.

Some of your jokes have been borderline racist though, and we really don't appreciate that. Like the one about asking the tribes to pull their gill nets from the mouth of the Klamath so that fish can make it upstream and eventually get to Scott and Shasta. The punch line was something about how we're lucky if any fish can get past those nets, which are made of nontraditional filament. Oh, and that the tribes are "self-reporting," so we don't really know how many fish they're catching. See, when you add too much detail to a joke it is no longer funny, and again, super boring.

And racist.

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Or there was that other one about how fishing boats from "other" countries (so racist!) on international waters catch as many of these special species as they can, with no respect to our Endangered Species Act. And how you can buy both Chinook and coho at the store for dinner. That actually is a pretty funny punch line.

And then there's that old saw about how the fish don't actually need any water in the river in

August, so turning off everyone's pumps is really just a "feel good" measure. And how turning off all the irrigation water in Scott Valley for the whole season still wouldn't have put 30 cfs in the river this August like we asked for. Yeah, maybe not, but it makes us feel good knowing we're trying! (Doesn't it feel good?)

OK guys, enough fun for one day. Remember to keep checking in with our website every day to see what may have changed about your curtailment orders. We would hate for you to miss something and start racking up \$1,000 per day in fines! But you can feel good about us not wasting taxpayer dollars by sending you any more letters about curtailment status. (Still keep an eye out for those violation warning letters though—we'll spare no expense on those, ha ha!)

Feeling good,

Your buddies at the Control Board

The nature of future correspondence from the Water Board will depend on how much rain and snow accumulate this winter and what farmers and ranchers decide to do this spring in the face of this tyranny.

Stay tuned. ■