

Friends,

For years we've been making the case that the SFPUC could manage the instream flow requirements of the Bay Delta Water Quality Control Plan without a serious risk of running out of water. And for years the Commissioners have pointed to the uncertainties of climate change to justify their extremely conservative drought planning scenario — the 8.5-year Design Drought — that is starving the Tuolumne River of freshwater flows. The Tuolumne salmon population is now at less than 1% of its historic numbers. This is a huge disgrace for conscientious San Franciscans and other Bay Area residents who get their water from Hetch Hetchy on the Tuolumne!

Beginning almost two years ago, the SFPUC began hosting seven workshops to take deep dives into policy issues, including science, demand projections, alternative water supplies and climate change. On Tuesday, 10 months after their previous workshop focusing on their Long-Term Vulnerability Assessment (LTVA) (climate change study), they finally held a workshop on the Design Drought.

We were given an opportunity to present, and produced ample evidence from the LTVA that the Design Drought is way too conservative and unnecessarily harms the Tuolumne River. For example, between 2012 and 2016 (five years) unimpaired flow on the lower Tuolumne averaged just 12%, but the SFPUC never had less than three years-worth of water in storage. The salmon-based ecosystem suffered tremendously as a result of the Design Drought.

We explained that the LTVA used 100 years of observed data, 1,100 years of tree-ring data, and 25,000 model runs using simulated data, but failed to produce a single drought as severe as the Design Drought. The Design Drought is 64% more severe than the drought of record (1987-1992). The LTVA suggests to us that the chances of the Design Drought beginning in any given year is 1-in-70,000.

SFPUC staff produced no evidence from the LTVA to justify the Design Drought. Instead, they pointed to vague uncertainties, and claimed the \$743,000 (rate-payer funded) LTVA was just a stress test, and was not meant to assess the validity of the Design Drought. The Commissioners bought it, and after two years and seven workshops, they have yet to take a single action to reform the Design Drought for the benefit of the Tuolumne River and Bay-Delta ecosystems.

Patience and reason have not worked with the SFPUC. We must buckle down and ramp up our efforts! If you would like to get more involved in the next phase of this campaign, please let me know. You can start by sending an email to the SFPUC encouraging them to value science and become environmental stewards of the Tuolumne River by dropping their lawsuits against the State Water Board. The Commission email is commission@sfgwater.org.

If you would like to view the recording of the Design Drought workshop, it is available at https://sanfrancisco.granicus.com/player/clip/41900?view_id=22&redirect=true&h=087062ed80a1dea47c9be980b598239b (click on Item 7 on the agenda to go directly to the workshop).

The San Francisco Standard had a good article on the issue — <https://sfstandard.com/politics/is-sf-hoarding-water-one-environmental-group-wants-the-city-to-get-real-about-its-planning/>.

With the 50th anniversary of the Clean Water Act approaching in October, it is time to turn up the heat on the SFPUC. We hope you will join us!

-Peter

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