

San Francisco Examiner

Welcome consensus on Hetch Hetchy

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EDITORIAL

The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission on Tuesday approved a revised plan for the multibillion-dollar upgrade and repair project on the massive Hetch Hetchy water system. The new plan eliminates one of the most expensive and controversial elements of the original rebuild, approved by voters three years ago, but officials say it still accomplishes the main goal of protecting the water supply for 2.4 million Bay Area residents. On top of that, it has the support of the SFPUC's water customers and most environmental groups.

As it now stands, the plan to update the 167-mile system, which brings water to The City and San Mateo County, is scheduled for completion in 10 years at a cost of \$4.3 billion. It will improve 75 facilities, including dams, pipelines and pumping stations, the goal being to harden the entire system against damage in an earthquake or terrorist attack.

The cost for the project will come partly from a \$1.6 billion bond measure approved by San Francisco voters, with other nearby communities that use Hetch Hetchy water responsible for the remainder.

The most significant change in the new plan is the decision to forgo building a new, 47-mile pipeline that environmentalists complained could have been used to draw much more water from the Tuolumne River, adversely affecting wildlife dependent on the river and providing an easy source of water for sprawl development. In addition to this stumbling block, the cost of the pipeline spiked dramatically, adding up to nearly \$1 billion on its own. Instead, the SFPUC has decided to use a cheaper method to accomplish its intended purpose, employing a shorter line and less-expensive piping to meet the need for carrying water while nearby pipelines are repaired.

"This is a prudent thing to do and the best way to move the project forward," said John Rizzo, chairman of the Bay Area chapter of the Sierra Club.

Rizzo is right in this respect. Although officials said the pipeline as first proposed would have been only a backup, it would have brought unproductive expense and uncertainty to the project as the SFPUC fought suspicions that there was some other motive for increasing carrying capacity. The new plan eliminates this obstacle and clears the path for the overall project.

Congratulations to the commissioners of the SFPUC, Director Susan Leal, suburban water customers and environmentalists for reaching a consensus that will allow a safe, stable supply of water without an unnecessarily adverse environmental impact. Now to

the formidable task of completing the project on time and on budget. The SFPUC is on a tight schedule and has its work cut out for it — and many eyes will be watching.

December 8, 2005

FROM READERS

Restore Alameda Creek

The Dec. 2 editorial neglected to mention the controversy over the major regional project in San Francisco's water system upgrade and The City's failure to get support from environmental groups working to restore Alameda Creek.

San Francisco diverts over 86 percent of natural stream flows in upper Alameda Creek, reducing habitat and leaving little water and high temperatures for native fish. Calaveras Dam has been operated in violation of state fish and game codes for decades, due to inadequate stream flow below the dam and blocked passage for migratory fish.

This summer 68 Bay Area conservation groups called on the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission to improve stewardship and restore water flow in Alameda Creek. The Alameda Creek Alliance has been seeking this restoration since 1997, so the issue is not new to the SFPUC. Unfortunately, the SFPUC's current proposal for the dam replacement project leaves steelhead trout restoration high and dry.

We are asking the SFPUC to add restoration of Alameda Creek and its fisheries as one of the purposes of the Calaveras Dam replacement project. To ensure this urgently needed seismic project moves forward quickly and cooperatively, San Francisco must commit to restoring Alameda Creek.

*Jeff Miller, Director
Alameda Creek Alliance*