



Tuolumne River Trust

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SFPUC Urged to Drop Costly and Damaging Pipeline Project

Invest in Water Conservation and Recycling, not harming Tuolumne River

(Fremont, Palo Alto, San Francisco, CA) Hundreds of California residents urged the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC) to eliminate a large new pipeline from its proposed \$4.3 billion water system upgrade plan. The comments were offered during five public meetings held by the SFPUC.

“The controversial pipeline jeopardizes urgently-needed seismic repairs because it could cause delays and cost overruns,” said Heather Dempsey, Bay Area Program Director for the Tuolumne River Trust, a conservation group with 2,000 members. “The \$500 million pipe is not only expensive and unnecessary, it will damage the Tuolumne River.”

Bay Area water rate increases will pay for the program. San Francisco rates are scheduled to increase from \$14 to \$55 per month for the average household.

San Francisco and 28 surrounding communities depend on Tuolumne River water, sent from high in Yosemite National Park to the Bay Area via tunnels and pipes. The new pipeline would increase San Francisco’s withdrawal capabilities to 400 million gallons per day (an increase of 70 percent over its current average withdrawal of 225 mgd).

The SFPUC insists the new pipeline, which would run parallel to three existing lines buried under 47.5 miles of the San Joaquin Valley, is only intended as a “spare” to enable maintenance. However, their own documents say the pipeline would be used to increase withdrawals from the river, and offer no safeguards preventing harmful diversions.

“It’s like building a new lane on a highway and saying you won’t use it,” said Jenna Olsen, director of the Trust. “Why spend \$500 million on a spare?”

Olsen and Dempsey point out that the pipeline is not described in San Francisco’s plan as one of the seismic projects. They also say San Francisco has options besides the fourth pipeline to maintain its system. And the Bay Area can meet future water demands by increasing conservation and recycling. The Commission justifies additional Tuolumne withdrawals based on a projected increase in demand of 14 percent by 2030.

“San Francisco should make the most of the water it already has before it goes looking for more from such a special river,” stated Dempsey. “Taking advantage of the latest

innovations in water use efficiency will ensure a cost-effective water plan for the Bay Area and a healthy Tuolumne River.”

San Francisco’s plan presents a similar threat to the local Alameda Creek. It could withdraw more water from the creek and harm steelhead runs. The SFPUC also proposes an unnecessary and damaging rubber dam on the creek.

San Francisco held the public meetings as part of a state-mandated environmental review process of their “Water System Improvement Program.” The SFPUC proposes to take an additional 25 million gallons a day from the Tuolumne River by the year 2030. The environmental review will also analyze an alternative that takes 35 mgd from the river, and two other alternatives that take no additional water from the river and instead meet future demands with conservation, recycling, groundwater, and water transfers.

More than 200 people supporting increased conservation and protection of the Tuolumne and local creeks attended meetings in Sonora (10/5), Modesto (10/6), Fremont (10/11), Palo Alto (10/18), and San Francisco (10/19).

Concerns that San Francisco’s water system, which crosses three active fault lines, would not withstand a major earthquake prompted the massive water upgrade project.

The Tuolumne River is one of fourteen federally designated Wild and Scenic Rivers in California and has the largest run of wild salmon in the San Joaquin Valley. The Tuolumne provides recreational opportunities that fuel the economic diversity in surrounding mountain towns and irrigates 300,000 acres in San Joaquin Valley, one of the country’s most productive agricultural regions.

Taking more water from the Tuolumne River harms water quality, not only for the river, but for the Sacramento/San Joaquin Delta, and San Francisco Bay. The Delta is currently experiencing a disturbing and dramatic drop in wildlife populations.

San Francisco’s pipeline plan placed the Tuolumne River on the nation’s Ten Most Endangered Rivers for 2005.

The Tuolumne River Trust has offices in San Francisco, Modesto, and Sonora, and promotes the stewardship of the Tuolumne River and its tributaries to ensure a healthy watershed. The Trust coordinates the Bay Area Water Stewards, a partnership with the Sierra Club, Clean Water Action, Environmental Defense, Alameda Creek Alliance, and others to ensure San Francisco pursues an environmentally sustainable water system.

Public Meeting Schedule

Fremont: Tue, Oct 11, 6pm, Fremont Main Library, 2400 Stevenson Blvd.

Palo Alto: Tue, Oct 18, 7pm, Palo Alto Arts Center, 1313 Newell Road

San Francisco: Wed, Oct 19, 7pm, Tenderloin School, 627 Turk Street

For more information – see www.tuolumne.org or call 415/292-3531

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