

What if we dam & flood Yosemite Valley as well?

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Imagine the howls out of San Francisco if President Donald Trump engineered a deal in Congress to build a reservoir at the mouth of Yosemite Valley and backed up water to a depth of 1,800 feet flooding iconic vistas and wringing the life out of a stretch of the Merced River for the purpose of providing water and power so big business can profit from expanding cities.

The thunderous, guttural chorus would shatter all eardrums within a hundred miles. After all, how dare the Republicans flood a national park?

Yet that is what San Francisco did getting Democratic President Woodrow Wilson to do just that to Hetch Hetchy Valley.

One would think a city that is now banning plastic straws and stirrers for environmental reasons would be open to right the most egregious environmental wrong ever inflicted on a national park. San Francisco voters, however, rejected a ballot measure in 2012 with 70 percent saying no to a proposal to study the idea of tearing down O'Shaughnessy Dam and restoring Hetch Hetchy Valley.

It should be noted that while President Trump's administration is not talking about the idea of damming Yosemite Valley, it is entertaining the concept of restoring the Hetch Hetchy Valley.

Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke Sunday met with the Restore Hetch Hetchy organization in a fact-finding meeting on the possibility of draining the 360,000-square-foot reservoir.

The dam removal is being billed as a way to enhance the reliable operation of the Central Valley Water Project and the overall water infrastructure in California by either enlarging storage at Don Pedro Reservoir and/or creating underground water banks.

Currently San Francisco and other Bay Area communities take an annual average of 265,000 acre feet of water from the Tuolumne River at Hetch Hetchy via a 167-mile pipe that passes under Modesto. That means 265,000 acre feet of water every year never helps with the endangered chinook salmon run or helps address pressing Delta environmental needs before it is taken out of its natural course and into a system that flows it into Bay Area faucets.

Other cities relying on Sierra watersheds such as Modesto, Manteca, Merced, Sacramento, and Stockton return water to rivers after it goes through extensive treatment so it can be put to use down river. By diverting water at Hetch Hetchy not a drop of the 265,000 acre feet of water that endangered fish such as chinook salmon and the Delta Smelt relied on for centuries benefits them today.

San Francisco could easily take their water from the Delta instead of at Hetch Hetchy.

San Francisco officials will tell you that they are against such a move as it would dilute the quality of their drinking water that is considered among the best in the western United States. That is in addition to the cost of creating more storage elsewhere.

What they forget to mention is that their water supply as they currently access it is not subject to court, state or federal decisions regarding water flows and fish nor is it part of drought restrictions when it comes to Delta water flows.

Those are the big unspoken reasons why Los Angeles wants to emulate the “single tunnel” known as the Hetch Hetchy Aqueduct that bypasses the Delta by building the “Twin Tunnels” to bypass the Delta as well.

As for the pure drinking water you have to wonder how many San Francisco residents actually drink water from faucets connected to the city water system. You’d think a city that would ban plastic straws and drink stirrers for environmental reasons would do the same for bottled water given how fiercely officials protect their high quality drinking when someone suggests tearing down the dam.

If the water is indeed that high of a quality — which it is — wouldn’t the politically correct San Francisco Board of Supervisors with a nasty tendency at times to be self-anointed nannies want to force people to drink the healthiest water? Besides, plastic bottles add to the waste stream.

Hypocrisy and double standards aside, a city overloaded with organizations and politicians that historically have looked down with dripping disdain on what Los Angeles did to the Owens Valley to secure water should look in the mirror.

At least Los Angeles is atoning for their sins. They have returned flows to a measured degree to the Owens River and are addressing the dust and environmental disaster they created at Owens Lake.

While every valley or canyon dammed is a bit of paradise lost there is disregard and there is desecration.

Flooding a stunning and unique part of a national park was hideously convenient for San Francisco.

The Raker Act of 1913 allowed San Francisco to “rent” Hetch Hetchy Valley for \$30,000 a year. To put that in perspective an average studio apartment outside of downtown rents for \$29,463 a year in San Francisco.

Dams are a necessary evil. That said they should be built with minimal damage and operated in such a manner that the maximum usage is obtained from the impounded water.

Hetch Hetchy fails miserably on both points.

Building O’Shaughnessy Dam was an act of desecration fueled by San Francisco’s greed to build the least expensive reservoir, the environment be damned.

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