Before the State Water Resources Control Board

State of California

Public Hearing to Consider Taking an Emergency
Drought-Related Water Rights Action
On a petition for Temporary Urgency Change in the
Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta

Scheduled to Commence
Tuesday, February 17, 2009

Testimony of Spreck Rosekrans
Environmental Defense Fund

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Boardmembers, thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding the petition for Temporary Urgency Change in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

My testimony is simple. The current drought, while serious, is far from unprecedented. The Department of Water Resources and Bureau of Reclamation are expected to rely on past hydrologic experience in California as a guide for project operations. Unfortunately, project operators withdrew too much water from upstream storage during water years 2007, 2008 and the beginning of water year 2009. As a result, storage in upstream reservoirs is abnormally low.

Exhibit EDF-3 shows end-of-year storage for the past 39 water years in principal upstream CVP and SWP reservoirs: Claire Engle, Shasta, Oroville and Folsom (water years end in September). The data show that storage at the end of 2006, a wet year, was more than 8 million acre-feet. At that time, project storage was in good shape.

The current drought can be described as 28 months long - beginning in water year 2007 and lasting, so far, through January 2009. Exhibit EDF-4 shows the 12 driest 28-month periods in a hydrologic record of less than 100 years, as measured by California's Eight River Index. As shown in Exhibit EDF-4, there have been 6 28-month periods drier than the 2007-2009 periods, and another 5 28-month periods that have been only marginally wetter.

The hydrologic conditions experienced during the current drought are far from unprecedented. They should have been anticipated by project operators.