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## **BITTERNESS RUNS DEEP IN CALIFORNIA BATTLE OVER BRINGING MORE WATER SOUTH**

By PHILIP SHABECOFF, Special to the New York Times

**SACRAMENTO, Calif.**— It would be no more than a big ditch, or, as the state water resources director described it, "a simple extension of the plumbing system."

But the proposed Peripheral Canal, a 43-mile-long, 400-foot-wide channel to carry water from the Sacramento River delta to an existing aqueduct and on to southern California, is polarizing the state's citizens and institutions.

Californians will vote this fall on whether to repeal a bill passed by the Legislature in 1980 authorizing construction of the canal. Even for a state with a long history of fierce battles over water, the debate is unusually belligerent. Northern Californians object sharply to shipping the water out of their region; southern Californians contend as strongly that they need the water for current emergencies and future growth.

That division is not unusual; as Ronald Robie, the water resources director, said, "People hate Los Angeles in northern California." But the issue is also dividing Republicans from Republicans and Democrats from Democrats, conservatives from conservatives and liberals from liberals. Gov. Edmund G. Brown Jr. is for the project; Lieut. Gov. Mike Curb is actively campaigning against it. The business community is split down the middle. So is the agricultural community. Environmentalists Divided

Even environmentalists are fragmented. Most of them oppose the canal, but a large number of others are urging that it be built because the plan contains environmental safeguards that might be lost if an alternative was chosen.

The intensity of the debate indicates that the demand for water is increasingly conflicting with other needs involving the economy, energy and the environment. As is often the case, what is happening in California may presage similar conflicts in other areas as competition increases for dwindling reserves of natural resources, including energy, minerals, land and air, as well as water.

The battle over the canal is forging strange alliances. For example, the League of Conservation Voters, an activist organization opposing the project on environmental grounds, is standing shoulder to shoulder with two powerful agricultural corporations, the J.G. Boswell Company and the Salyer Land Company. The businesses are helping to finance the campaign against the canal because they believe that it has too many environmental restrictions and that there are cheaper and better alternatives.

The competing parties offer wildly divergent estimates of what the project would cost. Jack Adams, who leads the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce's support for the canal, puts the figure under \$700 million at today's prices. He concedes however, that inflation over the 10 years of construction would probably push the cost to around \$1.2 billion.

Canvassers for the League of Conservation Voters, saying their figures come from state estimates, say the ultimate cost of the project will be \$23 billion. The state figures, however, are extrapolated from possible extensions of the water system to the year 2035 expressed in terms of what the dollar would buy 50 years from now.

Mr. Robie puts the ultimate cost of the project, including associated dams that would be built, at \$5 billion. But Sunne L. McPeak, a supervisor of Contra Costa County, through which the canal would run, said that the equipment required to pump the water from the delta would raise the cost to \$11 billion.

In an interview, Mr. Robie said the Legislature had voted for the canal only after a state referendum placed environmental protections in the state Constitution. They include assurances that wild rivers in the north, including the Eel, the Klamath, the Trinity and the Smith, will not be impounded to supply the water system. More Water Needed for Growth

David N. Kennedy, assistant general manager of the Metropolitan Water District, said, "The Peripheral Canal is needed to provide people with water."

While the area now has surplus water in most years, he said in an interview, it is expecting growth that would require 600,000 additional acre-feet a year by the end of the century. By that time, the canal is expected to be furnishing a million additional acrefeet.

Moreover, the area will have to give up a substantial percentage of its current rights to water from the Colorado River when the Central Arizona Project is built to divert more water to the Southwest. Even now, he said, there are barely sufficient supplies in drought years.

"Conservation is fine, but we already are doing a lot of conservation," Mr. Kennedy said. "Without carrying water from the delta we will have water rationing. This is a sound and economical project. We should get on with it."

Mr. Adams of the Chamber of Commerce expressed another concern. "Water is fundamental to creating jobs and a healthy economy," he said. "Without enough, southern California would go back to being a beautiful Palm Springs desert.

"The chamber believes in growth. We are not in the small is beautiful crowd. If there is a shortage, there not only will be no growth, the production levels we have now will be curtailed."

But Thomas J. Graff, general counsel to the Environmental Defense Fund, described the project as "very expensive, very damaging, and totally inappropriate in today's financial stress." Fears for Environment

Mr. Graff contended that diverting water from the Sacramento River would mean severe

environmental damage to the delta, the San Francisco Bay and its fisheries.

He also asserted that there would be enormous pressure to tap the wild rivers in the north after the canal is built. "The historical record of state water projects on the environment has been disastrous," he said. The canal, Mr. Graff insisted, would mostly benefit the corporate farmers of Kern County, who would get the surplus water from Los Angeles at what would amount to bargain basement rates.

He acknowledged that urban southern California might need extra water in droughts. "But the canal would be an enormously expensive insurance policy," he said. "We are saying that California can have that insurance at a much lower cost." Pricing Revisions Urged

He suggested revising the pricing system to reflect water's true value and lining canals to prevent loss through seepage. "The trump card of opponents is the cost issue," Mr. Graff said. "Water can no longer be treated as a free good. It has value." Sunne McPeak, the county supervisor, said the canal was a bad idea both economically and environmentally and because it would require an enormous amount of energy to operate.

She, too, insisted that the chief beneficiary would be Kern County agricultural businesses. Among other things, she said, cheap water would increase the value of the land there.

"What we are really talking about here," she said, "is the balance between the wise use of our resources on one hand and public support of the free enterprise system on the other. In the short run business can deplete a resource - be it water, air or earth - and turn a profit. But in the long run it cannot do so."

Illustrations: map of California photo of a pumping station