

Salmon Water Now Press Release

Salmon Water Now Exposes Westlands' Poisonous Legacy

Latest Release, "Bad Dirt, Bad Water, Bad Farms" Comes as Westlands Water District Seeks to Pump Potentially Tainted Groundwater into California's Water Supply

March 4, 2010

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Watch the Video:

YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Rk5K15TFFE>

Vimeo: <http://vimeo.com/9183542>

San Francisco, CA – A new Salmon Water Now video shines a light on the ongoing problem of Westlands Water District's toxic, poisonous land. Once thought to be resolved back in the 1980s, Westland's toxic legacy still lives on. Salmon Water Now's latest release provides historical perspective on news being made this week as Westlands seeks permission to pump up to 100,000 acre-feet per year of potentially tainted groundwater into the California Aqueduct, a drinking water supply for millions of people.

The video, "Bad Dirt, Bad Water, Bad Farms" tells the story of Westlands Water District's long history of spewing polluted, toxic runoff into California's land and water. Available online at www.salmonwaternow.org, the video describes how polluted runoff from vast areas of toxic soil within Westlands has already caused a shocking ecological disaster. Even worse, big agribusiness has continued to apply taxpayer-subsidized water to these same toxic soils for decades, compounding the problem.

In the 1980s, America was outraged when Westlands' selenium-tainted runoff led to the death and deformation of birds at Kesterson National Wildlife Refuge near Los Banos, California. The federal government sparked the catastrophe by building a drain to direct Westland's wastewater to the area. It took a strong public outcry and an exposé by CBS's *60 Minutes* before the government closed Kesterson and attempted to clean up the mess.

Today, huge quantities of selenium are still present in Westlands Water District soils, while even more selenium continues to naturally accumulate there. Continued farming on some 300,000 acres of Westland's drainage impaired soils causes increased toxic selenium and salt buildup that will eventually render the area a wasteland unless the tainted groundwater is drained away. Westlands has already been forced to retire some 100,000 acres of land for this reason. Even after the expenditure of millions of taxpayer dollars, the federal managers are still searching for an ecologically sound, fiscally responsible answer to the problem.

"Bad Dirt, Bad Water, Bad Farms" illuminates one of the most pressing water

policy questions facing the state: With the Delta's irreplaceable fisheries in free fall due primarily to lack of freshwater flows, does it make any sense to subsidize massive exports of freshwater from the Delta to Westlands and contribute to the formation of a future toxic waste site? Moreover, does it make any sense to allow Westlands to potentially contaminate public drinking water supplies with tainted groundwater?

Salmon Water Now interviews three experts in search of a solution to this complex problem: Dr. Christina Swanson, Chief Scientist and Executive Director of The Bay Institute, Carolee Krieger of the California Water Impact Network, and Lloyd Carter, the former *Fresno Bee* reporter who helped bring the Kesterson story to the public's attention. These experts agree that taking Westland's toxic acreage out of production will significantly improve the Delta's health. And by enforcing laws already on the books regarding inappropriate uses of California water, the State Water Control Board could save significant amounts of water to address the pressing water scarcity problems of the Sacramento River and Delta.

Unfortunately, water management in the Delta is currently woefully inadequate to restore the strong salmon runs that once formed the backbone of the fishing industry in California and Oregon. Great sacrifices have already been made in the form of two consecutive closed salmon seasons, intense hatchery programs, large job losses in the fisheries sector, and raised seafood prices for consumers. All of these sacrifices will be made in vain as long as water, our most precious resource, continues to be mismanaged for the exclusive benefit of California agribusiness. Now is the moment for California to adopt sustainable, equitable water management that will restore the Bay-Delta's salmon runs, bring back jobs, save coastal and Delta communities, and foster a newfound value for precious freshwater flows.

Salmon Water Now works to raise awareness of the plight of wild salmon and salmon-fishing communities dependent upon freshwater flows in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Bay-Delta. For more information, please visit www.SalmonWaterNow.org

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