



California Sportfishing Protection Alliance

"An Advocate for Fisheries, Habitat and Water Quality"

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June 14, 2010

Ms. Victoria Whitney, Deputy Director
Division of Water Rights
State Water Resources Control Board
P.O. Box 2000
Sacramento, CA 95812-2000
(via e-mail and surface mail)

Re: Protest/Comments on Petition for Temporary Change under License 1699
(Application 2033) of the Garden Highway Mutual Water Company

Dear Ms. Whitney:

The California Sportfishing Protection Alliance (CSPA) has reviewed the petition for a proposed Temporary Change under License 1699, Application 2033 of the Garden Highway Mutual Water Company to transfer 5,802 acre-feet of water to eight State Water Contractor Agencies between July 1, 2010 and September 30, 2010. The petition was noticed on May 11, 2010. We offer the following comments.

The proposed temporary change is not temporary.

Water Code Section 1728 defines a temporary change: "For the purposes of this article, a temporary change means any change of point of diversion, place of use, or purpose of use involving a transfer or exchange of water or water rights for a period of one year or less." Water Code Section 1735 says: "A long-term transfer shall be for any period in excess of one year."

The present petition is one of a number of serial petitions that reproduce the same transfers that were carried out in 2009 under the umbrella of the Drought Water Bank. Petitioner Sacramento Suburban Water District, another of the serial transferring parties, was candid in its description of its own proposed 2010 transfer: "The proposed transfer would substantially repeat the 2009 water transfer SSWD made through DWR's Drought Water Bank, which was approved by the SWRCB in Order WR 2009-0054-DWR." (see petition of the City of Sacramento and Sacramento Suburban Water District under License 12622, Application 11360, noticed May 13, 2010, page 2).

This is the second consecutive year that Garden Highway Mutual Water Company has petitioned for water transfer to many if not most of the same recipients. The amounts of the proposed transfer are similar. By the plain meaning of Water Code Section 1728, this petition should not be considered as a temporary transfer because it contemplates a second year of what effectively amounts to the same action. It should be considered a long-term transfer under Section 1735 of the Water Code.

Unlike changes, including transfers, under Water Code Section 1728, transfers under Water Code Section 1735 are not exempt from CEQA analysis under the Water Code Section 1729 exemption. The proposed change should therefore be analyzed under CEQA.

Falling under the requirement for CEQA analysis, the rules governing analysis of cumulative effects of the proposed long-term transfer should also apply. This is in notable distinction from Water Code Section 1727(e), which limits consideration of effects to the incremental effect of a temporary transfer alone, as opposed to the more comprehensive burden of the cumulative effects analysis under CEQA, which requires analysis of a proposed project in combination with other known or reasonably foreseeable actions that affect the environment.

The statutory limitation under Water Code Section 1727(d), which does not allow consideration of the ongoing effects to the public trust under the water right for which a temporary change is sought, also does not apply to long-term transfers. In addition to a CEQA analysis, a public trust analysis of License 1699, Application 2033 should therefore be conducted by the State Board.

The proposed transfer is in violation of Section Water Code Section 1745.10

There is no adopted groundwater management plan in Sutter County. Garden Highway has provided no evidence that its transfer will not contribute to conditions of groundwater overdraft. In order to comply with Water Code Section 1745.10, Garden Highway should be required to provide an analysis that demonstrates that its proposed transfer would take place from a location where long-term groundwater overdraft does not exist.

Non-response by the Department of Fish and Game does not necessarily denote absence of fisheries impacts.

In response to several comment letters regarding water transfers that CSPA filed in 2009, the State Board included a default response that read: “DFG was provided a copy of the subject petition and did not submit comments or concerns regarding the temporary change” (see, e.g., Order WR 2009-0040-DWR, page 6). The decision by DFG not to comment on transfers in 2009 reflected a policy decision and perhaps a workload decision made by DFG management, and likely its superiors in Resources and the Governor’s office. The State Board should not draw conclusions of substance based on failure by DFG to engage procedurally, either in 2009 or, should it come to pass, in 2010. The CEQA and public trust analyses that are required for the Garden Highway Mutual

Water Company's proposed transfer due to its long-term character will adequately disclose and analyze impacts to fisheries, including cumulative impacts in the Bay-Delta. CSPA reminds the Board that DFG submitted substantial written and oral testimony in the Delta Flow Proceeding conducted by the Board in January through March, 2010 regarding the dire condition of Bay-Delta fisheries, and also submitted extensive recommendations for greatly increased Delta outflow based on an equitable allocation of responsibility. The CEQA and public trust analyses for the proposed transfer should consider cumulative effects of the proposed project in light of the recommendations of DFG and other resource agencies and non-governmental organizations, including CSPA, in the Delta Flow Proceeding.

Conclusion

The requested transfer should be denied as a temporary transfer under Section 1725 of the Water Code. As a long-term transfer under Section 1735 of the Water Code, the proposed transfer should be analyzed under CEQA. The CEQA analysis should evaluate cumulative effects, not merely incremental effects.

As part of consideration of the long-term transfer, the Board should also conduct a public trust analysis of the petitioner's license.

Petitioner should be required to provide evidence that its proposed transfer will not contribute to conditions of long-term groundwater overdraft.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Petition for Temporary Change under License 1699 (Application 2033) of the Garden Highway Mutual Water Company.

Respectfully submitted,



Chris Shutes
Water Rights Advocate
California Sportfishing Protection Alliance

Certificate of Service

I hereby certify that on this day, June 14, 2010, I, Chris Shutes, have placed in first class mail at Berkeley, California, a true copy of this protest mailed to:

Garden Highway Mutual Water Company
c/o Gary Kienlen
MBK Engineers
1771 Tribute Rd., Suite A
Sacramento, CA 95815



Chris Shutes