

DC-WATER CALSKED 5-3

BY LLOYD G. CARTER

FRESNO (UPI)-- FOR 10 YEARS STATE WATER QUALITY OFFICIALS HAVE DELAYED ESTABLISHING SAFETY STANDARDS FOR FARM DRAINAGE WATER IN THE NORTHERN SAN JOAQUIN RIVER BASIN, ALTHOUGH SUCH WASTE WATER IS NOW DAMAGING THE SOUTHERN DELTA AND TRIGGERING FISHKILLS AND BIRD MUTATIONS IN WESTERN MERCED COUNTY.

DENNIS WESTCOT, AN AGRICULTURAL EXPERT FOR THE CENTRAL VALLEY REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD, WEDNESDAY DEFENDED THE BOARD'S LACK OF ACTION CONTENDING HIS AGENCY LACKED THE STAFF TO IMPLEMENT STANDARDS SOONER.

TOXIC WASTE WATERS CARRYING HIGH AMOUNTS OF THE TRACE MINERAL SELENIUM ARE BEING BLAMED FOR MASSIVE DEFORMITIES IN BIRDS AT THE KESTERSON NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE NEAR LOS BANOS IN WESTERN MERCED COUNTY. THE U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY HAS LAUNCHED A MAJOR STUDY TO MAP THE SELENIUM CONCENTRATIONS IN WESTERN SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY SOILS.

A STATE GAME WARDEN SAID EARLIER THIS WEEK THAT FISH KILLS OCCUR ON "VIRTUALLY A WEEKLY BASIS" IN THE 50,000-ACRE GRASSLANDS WATER DISTRICT, WHICH SURROUNDS KESTERSON AND ARE PROBABLY CAUSED BY TOXIC FARM WASTE WATERS.

LOU BECK OF THE CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES SAID RECENTLY 70 PERCENT OF THE SAN JOAQUIN RIVER, WHICH RUNS JUST EAST OF THE GRASSLANDS, IS COMPOSED OF DRAINAGE WATER IN THE LATE SUMMER MONTHS OF AN AVERAGE YEAR AND IT IS CAUSING DELETERIOUS EFFECTS ON THE DELTA.

AT A MEETING IN REDDING LAST FRIDAY, THE CENTRAL VALLEY REGIONAL BOARD DENIED A REQUEST BY KESTERSON AREA LANDOWNER JIM CLAUS TO HALT DISCHARGES INTO KESTERSON UNTIL THE HEALTH ISSUES COULD BE RESOLVED.

WILLIAM CROOKS, EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF THE BOARD, SAID HE SAW "NO NEED TO IMPOSE IMMEDIATE DISCHARGE REQUIREMENTS."

UPI OBTAINED A COPY OF A 1974 STUDY BY THE U.S. SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE, WHICH RECOMMENDED A PLAN FOR SOLVING THE DRAINAGE PROBLEMS OF FARMING AREAS UPSLOPE FROM THE GRASSLANDS AND KESTERSON. THAT PLAN WAS LATER REJECTED.

THAT 1974 STUDY, BY GYLAN DICKEY, NOTED "THE STATE WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD IS IN THE PROCESS OF ESTABLISHING WATER QUALITY STANDARDS FOR THIS PORTION OF THE SAN JOAQUIN RIVER. DILUTION REQUIREMENT FOR DISCHARGE INTO THE RIVER IS EXPECTED TO EXCEED THAT REQUIRED FOR DISCHARGE INTO THE WILDLIFE AREA."

DICKEY, CONTACTED EARLIER THIS WEEK IN LINCOLN, NEB., EXPRESSED SURPRISE NO STANDARDS HAD YET BEEN SET.

WESTCOT EXPLAINED "AT THE TIME HE (DICKEY) DID THAT STUDY THE BASIN PLAN WAS IN THE PROCESS OF BEING DEVELOPED. THE BASIN PLANNERS TOLD BOTH THE STATE AND REGIONAL BOARD THE PROBLEM WAS NOT WELL ENOUGH DEFINED THAT THEY COULD SET THE STANDARDS FOR DRAINAGE WATER AND TOLD THE BOARD TO SET THOSE STANDARDS IN THE FUTURE RATHER THAN DURING THE BASIN PLANNING PROCESS."

"THIS BOARD HAS PLACED ITS PRIORITY IN THE LAST SEVERAL YEARS IN THE TULARE LAKE BASIN (LOWER SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY), BECAUSE THAT IS WHERE THE DRAINAGE PROBLEM HAS BEEN MOST SERIOUS. AND WITH A LIMITED STAFF YOU HAVE TO SET PRIORITIES. AND WE SET OUR PRIORITIES ON ESTABLISHING THOSE STANDARDS IN THE TULARE LAKE BASIN. WE'RE BASICALLY FINISHED WITH THAT NOW AND THAT'S WHY WE'RE STARTING ON THE SAN JOAQUIN RIVER. IT COMES DOWN TO A STAFFING THING."

SERGEANT GREEN OF THE FRESNO OFFICE OF THE REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD OFFERED A DIFFERENT INTERPRETATION THAN WESTCOT. HE SAID THE STATE BOARD FIRST DECIDED TO ESTABLISH DELTA WATER QUALITY STANDARDS, WHICH TOOK ABOUT THREE YEARS, AND THE SAME PROCESS FOR THE SAN JOAQUIN RIVER HAS BEEN STALLED BY COMPLICATED BATTLES OVER WATER RIGHTS.

GREEN NOTED A RECENT COURT DECISION INVALIDATED THOSE DELTA STANDARDS AND INDICATED STANDARDS FOR THE DELTA AND RIVERS WHICH FLOW INTO IT NEED TO BE ESTABLISHED IN CONFORMITY.

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