

Ruling on Santa Ana sucker fish habitat is catastrophic

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The recent ruling by U.S. District Court Judge James V. Selna upholding the Santa Ana sucker fish habitat is morally, politically and environmentally catastrophic.

It amounts to theft of local water agencies' hard-earned water rights, and levels a severe blow to the economic prospects of the Inland Empire, an area already suffering terribly from recession. It is unjust, politically motivated judicial activism. And it sets the stage for a future flooding disaster.

Inland Empire water agencies could lose access to 119,800 annual acre-feet of water to which they already hold legal rights, rights that took 19 years and \$21 million to secure. According to John Husing, the cost of replacing this water over a 25-year period, if replacement water is available, which is unlikely, would be \$2.7 billion.

The sucker fish habitat will prevent completion of necessary downstream flood control infrastructure where floods have already occurred, in 1938 and 1969. This will put as much as \$400 million worth of property at risk. And what about the economic loss associated with reduced development and job growth potential? The cost of all this will be borne by the customers of the affected water districts.

Human beings, by their existence, affect the natural ecosystem, as do all manner of living things. That means we are part of the natural order, despite the efforts of environmental lobbies, government agencies and the courts to convince us otherwise.

We have as much right as any other creature to use our environment, responsibly and sustainably, for our health and welfare. And nothing is more necessary to health and welfare than a clean, sustainable water supply. Without this, everyone might as well vacate the Inland Empire tomorrow, and leave it to the Santa Ana sucker fish. Is this what Judge Selna desires?

Local water districts seem to have two options. We can accept the ruling and its consequently dismal economic and environmental prospects, or we can support continued litigation to appeal the decision. This will be costly and risky, but the first option is unacceptable to people trying to carve out a life in the Inland Empire.

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