

November 8, 2004

Honorable Joe Canciamilla  
Member of the Assembly  
State Capitol, Room 2141  
Sacramento, California 95814

Honorable Lois Wolk  
Member of the Assembly  
State Capitol, Room 6012  
Sacramento, California 95814

Dear Assemblymembers:

Thank you for your sharing your interest in research recently released that explores potential elements of any future effort to restore the Hetch Hetchy Valley in Yosemite National Park. On behalf of the Governor, I am pleased to respond to your letter of September 9, 2004.

Consistent with its mission to thoughtfully manage the State's natural resources, the Resources Agency shares your interest in the recent studies by Environmental Defense and U.C. Davis detailing a plan for replacement of the water and power provided by the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir so that the valley might be restored. These studies, along with others that have been conducted in past years, may provide a foundation for discussions of the complex opportunities and challenges associated with restoring a Yosemite National Park valley and the water and energy resource needs of a growing State.

For the purpose of initial review, the Department of Water Resources and the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) will consider aspects of Hetch Hetchy restoration. Specifically, I have asked the Department of Water Resources (DWR) to review the growing body of studies and analyses that have been prepared over the last 20 years including Environmental Defense and U.C. Davis efforts, and summarize the range of conclusions and considerations in this work. Additionally, DWR will consider the larger water supply impacts. Clearly, one of the foremost challenges posed by the proposal stems from the fact that California, faced with significant water demands, needs a net increase in water storage capacity, not a decrease. Any plan to remove or modify existing water storage systems would need to be balanced by a viable alternative plan to at a minimum, replace the water supply now provided by the Hetch Hetchy reservoir.

1416 Ninth Street, Suite 1311, Sacramento, CA 95814 Ph. 916.653.5656 Fax 916.653.8102 <http://resources.ca.gov>

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Although it is very difficult to place a value on the existence or acquisition of a natural feature, there are approaches that can be used. I have asked the DPR to work with the National Park Service (NPS) to identify accepted economic approaches to estimate a parkland value for a restored Hetch Hetchy Valley. Consideration of factors such as what relief, if any, might a Hetch Hetchy restoration offer to the heavy visitation pressure on Yosemite Valley may add value for this review.

The work program I have outlined is substantial and will need to be accomplished within the constraints of existing staff and budget. This review will be of limited value unless it is conducted in collaboration with affected local agencies and with appropriate federal participation. I will keep you informed of our progress.

California, its governor and its citizens, are committed to economically feasible restoration of ecosystems and preservation of open space. This commitment translates into an interest in reasonable proposals for expanding our trust resources. At the same time, we are a rapidly growing state and we are struggling with the challenges of improving water supply reliability and providing reliable power. As the various interests discuss the prospect of restoring Hetch Hetchy, we must balance our dreams and aspirations, our limited financial resources, and our need for water and power reliability. I look forward to developing additional information to support a public policy discussion that may arise on the future of Hetch Hetchy.

Sincerely,



Mike Chrisman  
Secretary for Resources

cc: Governor's Office