

SALINAS CALIFORNIAN

Carmel Rivers San Clemente Dam one step closer to removal

January 12, 2010

U.S. Congressman Sam Farr joined California State Senator Abel Maldonado, California State Assemblymember Bill Monning, Chair of the Monterey County Board of Supervisors Simon Salinas, California Secretary of Natural Resources Michael Chrisman, representatives from National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and several state agencies including the California Public Utilities Commission and California State Coastal Conservancy today, in signing a "Collaboration Statement" with local water provider California American Water. The document commits the various parties to "work collaboratively over the next year... making a good faith effort" to develop a project plan and find funding sources for removal of the San Clemente Dam.

"Removing San Clemente Dam will bring the Carmel River back to life and restore critical habitat for threatened species, including one of the most important populations of steelhead trout on the Central Coast," said Congressman Farr. "It will be the first project of its kind in California."

The San Clemente Dam is a 106-foot high concrete-arch dam, which was built in 1921, eighteen miles from the ocean on the Carmel River, to supply water to the Monterey Peninsula's then-burgeoning population and tourism industry. The proposed method for removing the dam involves rerouting the Carmel River to bypass the 2.5 million cubic yards of silt that have accumulated behind it, an innovative approach that avoids dredging. It would take more than 200,000 truckloads to remove the silt, making dredging both environmentally infeasible and objectionable to nearby residents.

"Dam removal will help us improve river habitat and comply with a directive from the Department of Safety of Dams," said California American Water president Rob MacLean. "We've altered our operations over time to minimize impacts to the river and the dam no longer serves its original purpose as a water storage facility for our customers. Instead, its removal provides an opportunity to work in partnership with natural resource agencies toward protection of the river and its habitat."

In 1991, the California Department of Water Resources, Division of Safety of Dams agreed with a California American Water consultant's assertion that San Clemente Dam did not meet modern seismic stability and flood safety standards. The Department of Water Resources and Army Corps of Engineers studied many ways to ameliorate the safety issues including strengthening the dam and removing the dam. Dam removal, while more expensive, is favored by environmental groups and public agencies concerned with protection and enhancement of the Carmel River ecosystem.

"This project demonstrates the effectiveness of public-private partnerships and is proof that water reform and environmental protection are not mutually exclusive," said Senator Maldonado.

“Removal of this dam will help revive a river that has been the lifeblood of the Monterey Peninsula community and protect the threatened steelhead trout. This is the kind of balanced reform we need across the state. It is something we can be very proud of today and I commend the teamwork and collaboration that has brought this project to fruition.”

The National Marine Fisheries Service has determined the run of Central Coast Steelhead Trout, while a small population, is critical to the recovery of steelhead on the Central Coast.

“Steelhead will have access to over 25 miles of natural spawning and rearing habitat as a result of this project,” said Assemblymember Monning. “Dam removal will aide in the recovery of this threatened species – which is only one among many benefits brought by this coming together of public and private interests.”

California American Water has implemented interim risk reduction measures at the dam while working with NOAA Fisheries and the California State Coastal Conservancy to implement the dam removal project while minimizing cost to its ratepayers. California American Water has committed \$50 million – the cost of the strengthening project - and the dedication of 928 acres where the dam is located as parkland. The Coastal Conservancy and NOAA committed to raise the additional \$35 million needed for the removal project through a combination of public funding and private donations. The California Public Utilities Commission, as California American Water’s primary regulator, will need to approve the project before it proceeds.

California American Water, a wholly owned subsidiary of American Water (NYSE: AWK), provides high-quality and reliable water and/or wastewater services to more than 600,000 people. Founded in 1886, American Water is the largest investor-owned U.S. water and wastewater utility company. With headquarters in Voorhees, N.J., the company employs more than 7,000 dedicated professionals who provide drinking water, wastewater and other related services to approximately 15 million people in 32 states and Ontario, Canada. More information can be found by visiting www.amwater.com.