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What to do with Hetch Hetchy **We cannot lose this resource**

- Jim Wunderman

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On this we can agree: Today, the Hetch Hetchy Valley is one of the most beautiful places on the planet. Nearly 50,000 hikers, campers and visitors spend time there each year. Given the valley's beauty, it's understandable that a group of people wants to increase access to Hetch Hetchy Valley. Unfortunately, here's their price: removing O'Shaughnessy Dam and the water supply for 2.4 million people in Santa Clara, San Mateo, Alameda and San Francisco counties -- roughly one-third of all Bay Area residents.

The main pillar of the O'Shaughnessy Dam removal argument is that the water stored at Hetch Hetchy could instead be kept at the New Don Pedro Reservoir, downstream on the Tuolumne River. There are numerous fatal problems with this plan, not the least of which is that the public agencies that own New Don Pedro Reservoir have made it clear that there is no surplus storage or water available in New Don Pedro Reservoir and no Bay Area city owns any water in New Don Pedro.

For the sake of argument, let's take a look at what could happen to the Bay Area if we lost Hetch Hetchy Reservoir. In 1913, Bay Area leaders secured the water rights in Hetch Hetchy that would provide for the region for generations to come. Since 1913, California's population has grown from 3 million to 36 million people. With that population increase have come increasingly desperate demands for more water supplies. Today, largely due to protective environmental laws, building more water storage is next to impossible. In the next 20 years, the state will add another 14 million people, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Yet, the Bay Area's water supplies have been protected because of the seniority of its water rights. If the Bay Area lost Hetch Hetchy, we would lose both our guaranteed source of highly pure water and the benefit of the seniority of our claim. The region would move from essentially the front of the line to the very end of the line for our claim on perhaps the scarcest resource in the state.

If water were abundant in California, this wouldn't be a problem. But it is a problem. California's water infrastructure hasn't been expanded or improved since the 1960s, despite population that has more than doubled. Indeed, the supply is so short that federal and state officials are moving forward with plans to increase pumping from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta by 27 percent, further reducing the fresh water flow into San Francisco Bay.

Even if the Bay Area were able to take water away from other users to replace the quantity lost from Hetch Hetchy, there is no way to replace the quality lost from Hetch Hetchy.

Originating high in the Sierra Nevada range on a clean granite watershed, Hetch Hetchy water is unparalleled in its purity, safe from bacterial contamination that has bedeviled other



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water systems. This also provides a key competitive advantage to the Bay Area economy. The NUMMI automobile factory in Fremont was consciously designed to take advantage of the purity of Hetch Hetchy water for sanding and rinsing auto bodies. Likewise, Intel uses million of gallons of Hetch Hetchy water daily in its Santa Clara wafer fabrication plant. Roche Pharmaceuticals counts on Hetch Hetchy water for developing drugs for treatment of viruses and diseases.

The Bay Area's water needs are indelibly linked to the state's water supply security. Simply talking about removing the Hetch Hetchy water supply could upset the decades of hard-fought efforts embodied in the California Federal Bay-Delta Program. CalFed represents a delicate political balance between farmers, environmentalists and residential water users, as well as Northern and Southern California. It is the peace treaty that ended California's water wars. Removing Hetch Hetchy Reservoir would reopen CalFed, likely restarting the water wars that paralyzed California in the past.

A final problem with removing Hetch Hetchy Reservoir is the most obvious. Where would the Bay Area find another clean source of water for 2.4 million people? Our system is already maxed out, and Hetch Hetchy water users have agreed to finance a \$3.6 billion improvement and expansion of the system to slake impending needs. In a state as desperate for water as California, any possible source requires a fierce fight. While draining Hetch Hetchy may not be a viable option, there are many and numerous opportunities to restore and improve environmental quality without harming public health or the economy.

A few weeks ago, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's secretary for resources, Mike Crisman, directed his agency to compile past studies and analyses regarding Hetch Hetchy. In a letter on the topic, we believe he correctly noted, "Clearly, one of the foremost challenges posed by the [Hetch Hetchy removal] proposal stems from the fact that California, faced with significant water demands, needs a net increase in water storage capacity, not a decrease." We applaud the caution expressed and think expending resources to study the removal of Hetch Hetchy is a trip down the wrong path.

To protect Hetch Hetchy Reservoir is not to be hostile to environmental quality; it is to be honest and rational about the importance of water to the Bay Area. In a time when the state is gasping for water, to suggest that the Bay Area give up its water rights, significantly reduce its water quality, put in jeopardy the water supply of 2.4 million residents and seriously risk losing its most prominent industries -- all just to increase access to a valley that nearly 50,000 people a year already visit -- seems the height of folly.

Jim Wunderman is president and CEO of the Bay Area Council, a federation of CEOs of 275 of the largest employers in the Bay Area.

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