

from the desk of Felice Pace

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To Capital Press Editors:

An article in the October 19th edition reported that, in spite of \$4.6 billion spent to restore the Sacramento Bay Delta ecosystem, that ecosystem has continued to decline and is now in crisis. The article zeros in on the main reason the Cal-Fed Program has failed to achieve its restoration mandate: “While many of those projects (restoration funded through Cal Fed) are regarded...as worthwhile in their own right, they have done almost nothing to achieve the main goals...”

The failure of government funded restoration programs is not limited to Cal Fed. Thirty years of restoration funding has not stemmed the decline of Chesapeake Bay and in the Everglades the “largest restoration program in history” was recently found to be benefiting development interests more than the ecosystem. Closer to home, a 20-year state-federal effort to restore the fisheries of the Klamath River recently ended; salmon and other fisheries are at greater risk today than they were in 1986 when the program began. The larger but newer coast-wide federal salmon restoration program has not performed much better.

These and many other large restoration programs all fail for the same reasons:

- ◆ Those controlling how restoration funds are spent (agencies and stakeholders) choose the easy projects (the so-called “low hanging fruit”) but can rarely agree to take on those issues critical to achieving restoration which are often controversial (e.g. water reallocation).
- ◆ Agencies, tribes and restoration groups propose and support projects which meet their own needs – including the need to keep their bureaucracies funded – over the priority needs of the ecosystem.
- ◆ There is a lack of program and project evaluation and accountability. A recent national review found that standards for river and watershed restoration are lacking and that less than 15% of river restoration projects nation-wide had any type of results evaluation or effectiveness monitoring.

In summary, restoration funding is increasingly seen as pork to be delivered by politicians and spent to benefit human institutions – especially agency, non-profit and tribal bureaucracies. For example, California Fish and Game once evaluated restoration projects based on whether they moved a stream toward “properly functioning condition.” But now most CDFG administered restoration funds go to assist irrigators comply with the ESA and other legal mandates. The principle that restoration funds should not be used for mitigation or regulatory compliance has been abandoned.

How long will American Taxpayers be willing to fund restoration which does not deliver what it has promised? Those who cherish the “Restoration Economy” would do well to recognize the need for reform. Restorationists and their supporters must insist that restoration standards and accountability are restored; otherwise they are likely to wake up one day and find that the Restoration Economy has been defunded.

Felice Pace

(Felice was an early supporter of the Restoration Economy including helping to create the Clinton Administration's Jobs-in-the-Woods restoration program. He lives near the mouth of the Klamath River.)