

Let's "Nuke" the California Drought – and end the Water Wars

The lower half of California and most of the Southwest ranges from an arid to a semi-arid desert that is currently experiencing another one of its normal and predictable drought cycles, it's a "what goes around comes around" kind of a thing with some droughts lingering longer than others, the early native peoples were not big on keeping weather records thus we can only poke into the dirt, look to Bristlecone Pines, study IR and Radar satellite images of ancient dried-up, now covered, lakes and river beds for a hint of what was, and they all indicate that over centuries there were some very long very dry periods that most likely displaced and changed many times over the watersheds, native animals, plants and peoples of the area. The California drought is not a recent human caused phenomena...

The weather in California has always been a topic for jokes as everyone here knows that predicting weather in Southern California, even one day in advanced, is more difficult than picking a 6 horse parlay at Santa Anita. In the 50's various weather changes were humorously blamed on the recently dropped atomic bombs and later the on-going nuclear tests near Las Vegas, unfortunately today too many people seem to have lost their sense of humor, the normal weather cycles are now blown out of proportion and pointed to as ominous signs of pending doom blamed on too many people using too much fossil fuel, such as burning charcoal briquettes in old rusting seasoned BBQ's instead of using government recommended sun powered solar broilers making only tasteless no-drip smokeless fat free turkey weenies and veggie burgers. Tomorrow, perchance, brings a very heavy week long rainstorm with accompanying mud slides, the media will quickly blame the storm on anthropogenic global warming, meaning too many people generating and exhaling too much CO₂. The present drought cycle is presented as "the worst ever" but is it really, maybe it's just that today there are more unhappy disenchanting people living and working in closer quarters, driving to work and back on overcrowded freeways while constantly hearing about climate change and the weather via mind dumbing personal communications devices, TV's and a media that never sleeps, one thing is for sure, today there are more self-appointed full time "Celebrity Weather People" all breathlessly shouting at us about ever worsening weather conditions, then there were "Weather People" in the entire world of the 1950's...

If you are a tourist hiking in the California desert in summer and run out of water fear not, you are more likely to drown in a flash flood than die from thirst and dehydration, just do a quick button push on your smart phone and it will call-up a nearby store that sells and will deliver bottled water, microwaved wet burritos of dubious heritage, cheap local blended boxed wine, stale trail mix and paper towels to wipe and dry your new wet and muddy hiking boots, and then continue to enjoy your California vacation, and after you spent all your money please go home and not overstay your "Visa"...

The recurring California drought always brings up speculation about sea water conversion, there is nothing mysterious about sea water conversion technologies like distillation, reverse osmosis and evaporation, proven technology's that have been around a long time, within the past decade many new techniques have been developed now in various stages testing. With about a 1000 mile coast bordering the Pacific Ocean there is no shortage of water in California, what there is, is a shortage of political interest and the will to do something about the cabal of hundreds of powerful water-rights middlemen, stakeholders and water board bureaucrats, all comfortably settled-in, that will lose big time if sea water conversion comes on-line and starts to compete, even a smidgen, with traditional terrestrial water sources, limited sources which as everyone in the "water business" knows are over-allocated, meaning they have over-promised and oversold more water than is available, or under present circumstances, will ever be. Maybe this drought will last long enough to bring that scam out into the open, but don't count on it, as always happens one big heavy rain storm with plenty of snow covering the slopes and all will be forgiven and forgotten, until the next drought. And that is one weather prediction you can count on...

Sea water desalination on a really big scale can offer water that is cheaper, cleaner, more reliable and more available than what now exists. Processing sea water will be easier, less expensive and more effective than trying to restrict water use or recycling “grey water”, and of course abundant low cost water will substantially reduce the cost of food and bring back those beautiful green lawns, flowing fountains, real live flowers, living plant gardens, reasonably priced “grade “A” fancy” veggies, full flow shower heads, water slides, neighborhood kids (with their big sisters in bikinis) making big bucks washing cars on the street, and then there is my favorite, squirting my ex-wife’s cats with a high pressure water hose...

Now you’re probably wondering about the “Nuke” heading? In the mid 1950’s an up-beat nuclear power industry was going to provide almost free electricity to the masses, fantastic new ideas on how to use this “free” electricity popped up all over the media, I was a brand new engineer working for a company that provided microwave systems to railroads and pipelines for the transmission of data, voice and video along their thousands of miles of route easements and right-of-ways. Drought cycles in California were well known as were flash-floods and mud slides that contaminated fresh water supplies so sea water conversion back-up was often in the news, thus in 1957 with a unlimited supply of low cost nuclear electricity just around the corner, my employer and a group of forward thinking company’s teamed up and presented the State an unsolicited proposal to undertake a study leading to a cost proposal and pilot plant program to supplement the sometimes undependable terrestrial water supplies with dependable 24/7/365 desalinated water from the beautiful cool Pacific Ocean, the main thrust of the plan targeted agriculture, water intended for Ag use would be easier to process, supplementing Ag water would free thousands of acre feet of natural water for other purposes...

California is the nation’s main source for year around veggies and many other Ag products, it was known even “back then” that supporting the growing local and national market would eventually require more water than was available. The proposal suggested that ocean water could be pumped inland, to various high water demand agricultural locations in Central and Southern California, areas for the most part that were pumping ground water, there the sea water would be locally processed for Ag use, then pumped down to replenish the aquifers, reservoirs, lakes, etc.

The engineering was sound and the project was doable but with plenty of water then available and the almost overnight California population explosion (from 13 million to 37 million) totally unforeseen the project looked to be an un-necessary expenditure, and was scuttled. With current California electricity rates about the highest in the nation, with water tables falling as water demands rise, with water wars in the making as water policy and management postulate in gridlock, with new advanced water processing and pumping technology available, and most important, with low cost nuclear power back on the table, it’s time to take a serious look at mega-level prime time desalinization and “Nuke” the California drought bugaboo once and for all...

The preceding article described an important project that can and should be undertaken. The multi-million dollar cost, big money in the 50’s, but now in comparison to today’s mind-boggling government spending and waste is “mere chicken feed”. The project can start small, less than the money lost in Solyndra, be tested, then extended or disbanded as only actual real-world field testing and daily use can define; it’s a “we will never know unless we do it” thing, if successful and implemented to its full potential the Pacific Ocean can provide more water than California will ever need and no one need to feel guilty about wasting water, most of which ends up in the ocean anyway. The program could be biggest job creation project and the most notable engineering achievement of the 21st century...If it fails little money lost but much knowledge gained... <http://www.vonborks.org> vonborks@gmail.com