

MARK TWAIN WAS RIGHT...WHISKEY'S FOR DRINKING AND WATER'S FOR FIGHTING

The fighting's begun. On June 29, five hearty San Luis Obispo County Farm Bureau members traveled to Sacramento to speak out at the Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee hearing. I especially want to thank our President Richard Gonzales, Anna Negranti and Jim Hartzell who joined Jackie Crabb and me on this safari.

Why did we go? To join other agriculturalists, agencies and districts who were in opposition to the SB 565 water bill. We put forward our best arguments. Unfortunately, even though there were only 6 present who supported the bill and over 100 opposing, the bill passed out of the Water Committee. It is now in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

Why did we go to these lengths? If SB 565 passes, it will give the State Water Resources Control Board (in reality their staff, and we have seen what the Regional Water Board staff has done for us) very sweeping authority to come on private property to inspect the facilities of any person or entity to determine if you are in compliance with their water use requirements.

I see this bill as giving the State Water Resources Board almost as much police power as the Department of Fish and Game, as far as water use goes.

THEY CAN ORDER anyone who uses water to prepare and submit any technical or monitoring report or any fish study they desire. AND you pay the bill!!! Boy, will you pay as technical reports and fish studies run into the 10s and 100s of thousands of dollars.

As part of this legislation more fees are coming. SBX7 8, which was just passed this year, required us to file "A Statement of Water Diversion and Use." If SB 565 passes, it creates that annual price tag that we warned might be coming.

It is almost unbelievable that in this difficult financial period, the legislature is giving the State Water Resources Control Board the right to seriously pick your pocket by letting the Board set the fee schedule to recover their costs, plus giving the Board the right to adjust the fees each year if they believe that they did not receive sufficient revenues.

To add insult to injury, SB 565 will create a Water Rights Fund so the fees we pay will go to water restoration projects and conservancies.

If SB 565 passes and you are found to be in violations of their regulations, they can set the "highest market value of water" as the price of your civil penalty. Oh yes, and they can make you open your books to see if you can financially pay the bill.

It is unconscionable for SB 565 to be added to the regulations before the implementation of all the thousands of water diversion filings and determination of the success of the filing has even been completed. The skeptical side of me sees this as a state money grab

and we need to stop it.

Now you know why we went to Sacramento. Even though we lost this round, we will still keep fighting. We will keep you alerted to the developments of the bill. We may be asking you to send letters or e-mails as the bill progresses. We ask that you contact Assemblyman Sam Blakeslee and urge his opposition to the bill when it comes before him; send e-mails to Assemblymember.blakeslee@assembly.ca.gov.