

# Feather River Top Plan for Water

## Project Only One to Advance to Major Appropriation Stage

[California's water problem has reached, once again, a crucial point. Basic decisions need to be made by residents of the State. The Times presents today the third of a series defining the pressing questions involved, and telling what is being done about them.]

BY ED AINSWORTH

One issue more than any other has focused attention recently on California's water problem and brought it to a head.

This is the Feather River Project.

Of the many suggestions made for supplemental supplies for water-deficient Southern California in the years to come the Feather River idea has received more publicity than any other. It has stirred controversy; some public, some sub-

merged. "It, of course, is far from being the only proposal for bringing water here from long distances or for creating new supplies right here in our own back yard.

### California Contention

For a while the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation under previous administrations was talking about bringing water to Southern California from the Columbia River. This was discounted, however, because of the oft-expressed suspicion that the suggestion was merely a diversionary one to distract California's attention from the alliance of the bureau and Arizona which were trying to "put over" the so-called Central Arizona Project with Colorado River water. California contended that the Arizona scheme would take Colorado water rightfully belonging to this State and that the Columbia was advanced as a possible source simply to justify the Colorado River "grab."

Another bureau proposal was that California get busy and reclaim sea water and thus end the necessity of going anywhere for river water. Serious experiments are proceeding, of course, with sea water reclamation but there apparently is no immediate prospect of a power supply cheap enough to make it economically feasible on a large scale.

### Studies Approved

The Trinity River and the Klamath River both have been mentioned as possible sources in the northern part of the State. But the Feather River project is the only one that has advanced to the stage of major legislative appropriations for studies of engineering possibilities and routes. The Feather River is the most important tributary of the Sacramento River. It flows an average of about 4,500,000 acre-feet a year.

A strange contradiction has arisen in connection with the proposal for harnessing the river.

Some Northern Californians have been asserting that Southern California is trying to "grab" water in the north.

Some Southern Californians have been declaring, on the other hand, that the Feather River project is strictly a Northern California flood control plan and that the south, where most of the taxpayers live, has been "hitched on" only to pay the bill.

### Must Be Analyzed

The facts indicate that neither viewpoint is wholly, or even substantially, correct. The matter has to be analyzed on its merits to arrive at the truth.

First of all, it must be remembered that the Feather River ideas as far back as 1931—23 years ago—had advanced to a point where the State Engineer recommended that a dam be built on the river near Oroville in Butte County, as part of the State water plan. By 1949 the U.S. Army Engineers, the U.S. Reclamation Bureau and the State had agreed that such a dam should be built for flood control and that the impounded water should be put to beneficial use.

Then the flood control angle really became uppermost when the "Feather River project," as such, first took specific shape.

### Contract Made

An organization known as the California Central Valleys Flood Control Association, with John M. Luther as manager, on Feb. 1, 1951, made a contract with the State Engineer, A. D. Edmonston, and the State Water Resources Board for a preliminary study and report on the project. The flood control group put up \$7500 and the State matched it. With this \$15,000 the initial report was to be completed in four months, by June 1, 1951.

This report proposed a dam impounding 2,500,000 to 3,000,000 acre-feet at Oroville on the Feather River, channels and canals down the San Joaquin Valley and a "lift" of approximately 3400 feet in height

over the Tehachapi Mountains to reach Southern California.

The estimated cost of the project was set at \$1,270,387,000 without the power plant lift the water the 3400 feet. It has been estimated that the power of two Hoover Dams would be required for this purpose.

### Estimate Set

The estimate of water cost for Southern California was set at \$50 per acre-foot. This contrasts with \$10 for raw water now charged by the Metropolitan Water District.

Later, the State Engineer stated that the \$50 figure was based on full, not partial, use of the facilities. Southern California water engineers translated this to mean that the actual cost of the water therefore would be around \$100 per acre-foot for a number of years.

This, of course, was predicated on the 3400-foot lift, which would provide water for places like the Antelope Valley (Palmdale has an elevation of 2665 feet) and the "high desert," where some 1,000,000 acres could be irrigated if water were available at a cost the farmers could pay.

### Further Studies

Discussions of these high costs resulted in further stud-

ies of routing to see whether the expense could be reduced.

Yesterday, Samuel B. Morris, general manager and chief engineer of the Los Angeles Water and Power Department, summarized his views about this aspect of the Feather River matter.

"I favor the Feather River idea for our next source of water," he said. "However, studies now are being made of a tunnel from the San Joaquin Valley that would bring the water to Southern California at an elevation of 1600 feet—approximately the same as the lift on the Metropolitan Water District Colorado River Aqueduct. This would mean of course that areas higher up, such as the Antelope Valley, would have to pay the cost for their own facilities to lift the water the extra 1000 feet or so up to them if they wanted it."

The cost studies are proceeding.

### \$2,000,000 Provided

It is interesting to note that, since the original \$15,000 survey by the flood control group and the State Engineer, the Legislature has provided about \$2,000,000 for additional engineering studies.

In the last session of the Legislature, a contest developed over a proposal that \$75,000,000 State "rainy day" fund be used to acquire Feather River project sites. The proposal was rejected. In the process, the Legislature disclosed an attitude that one observer summarized in this way:

"Let's not get committed piecemeal, to a project which has not been fully studied. Let's find out more facts before we undertake something that in its present form may not be economically feasible."

### Gaining Attention

In this connection, the problem of how the project would be financed has been gaining added attention. The original 1951 report suggested that the Federal government might provide \$50,000,000 for flood control and that the State might add \$86,296,000 for flood control and water development, and that the remainder of the

money could come from revenue bonds or general obligation bonds of the State. Since then, it has been pointed out in Southern California that at the projected cost of \$50 to \$100 per acre-foot there could be no market for such water in the discernible future, and that revenue bonds could not therefore be sold.

This necessitates further study of means of financing.

At the moment, as the result of misunderstandings over various aspects of the Feather River project, responsible leaders in both Northern and Southern California are suggesting the desirability of comprehensive new technical conferences to work out practical details.

This necessarily brings up the subject of a more coherent and tangible State-wide approach to water and its distribution.

The possibilities of this now are being explored.

(Continued tomorrow)