

Feather River Battle Rages Outside of L.A.

Scores of Cities and Towns Fear Dispute Over East Branch Aqueduct Will Bar Water

BY RAY HEBERT, Times Urban Plans Editor

Down Southern California's inland valleys, as far south as San Diego, they're still fighting the battle for Feather River water.

More than two years after the \$1.75 billion statewide water development system was approved, there is a growing fear that northern water may never reach scores of cities and communities outside the Los Angeles metropolitan area.

This apprehension stems from a dispute over the East Branch Aqueduct, the so-called high line route that would carry Feather River water across the Antelope

spoken critic of MWD and its officers, bringing Feather River water to the San Bernardino region by way of MWD's proposed tunnel route would not solve the district's problems.

Under this plan, he says, water would be delivered at an elevation of 900 ft. The district, in turn, would be forced to pump it as high as 2,800 ft. to distribute it to all its customers.

"The high line East Branch, on the other hand, would come in behind us — through the San Bernardino Mountains," Wilde explained. "That's the line we're fighting for, the one the state has promised to build."

Southeast of San Bernardino, the San Geronimo Pass Water Agency, although it has contracted for only 15,000 acre-feet, has a problem just as acute.

President Ted Silverwood explained the agency's position this way:

"The state water program was developed, after nine years of bickering, on the basis of serving areas of need. It would be a grave mistake to cut off the East Branch. If it is abandoned, it will be by the will of a few people who don't see the economic benefits to all the people."

San Diego water officials regard proposals to abandon or delay the East Branch as "dangerous" to the entire water-deficient county and its busy metropolitan hub.

Will Oppose Delay

Roughly 90% of the region's domestic and industrial water comes from the Colorado River through the San Diego County Water Authority's membership in MWD. But this water is highly mineralized, a condition the authority hopes to correct by commingling it with purer Feather River water.

The authority, of course, has a voice in whatever action MWD takes. Its directors, led by Fred Heilbron, authority chairman, are certain to oppose any plan to delay or abandon the East Branch, a situation that could cause a serious split on MWD's board.

W. H. Jennings, the authority's general counsel, believes the East Branch should be built to insure San Diego's security. No matter how the pending Colorado River case is decided, he feels, it will mean a reduction in Southern California river supply — San Diego's primary source of water.

Heilbron — San Diego's venerable "Mr. Water" — seriously doubts whether

MWD's proposed foothill tunnel and pipeline route would ever reach Perris Reservoir, jumping off point to the San Diego Aqueduct.

Fears End of Line

"La Verne is probably as far as it would be built in the foreseeable future," he says. "Who in the Los Angeles area is going to vote for a bond issue to carry it beyond that point?"

Heilbron, to further justify San Diego's "right" to the East Branch, recalls that the county's overwhelming vote for the Feather River Project bond issue in 1960 was predicated on receiving northern water through the East Branch aqueduct. He puts it this way:

"If it had not been for San Diego's vote, that bond issue would never have carried."

Second of two parts.

Valley and high desert areas, through San Bernardino and deposit it in Perris Reservoir in Riverside County.

William E. Warne, director of the State Department of Water Resources, has given his repeated assurances that the 128-mile branch will be built on schedule to deliver water in 1972.

"We are considering all possible plans that might be adopted by agreement among our contractors," he said recently, "but there is no substitute visible now for the East Branch and the Cedar Springs and Perris Reservoirs."

Even so, the Metropolitan Water District, already committed to paying 70% of the state project's total cost, is moving toward a decision that could eliminate or delay indefinitely the desert high line.

Before June 30, the district's 45 directors probably will be asked to approve a plan to bring Feather River water into the Los Angeles area through the much shorter West Branch Aqueduct.

Use Tunnels, Pipes

East from the San Fernando Valley, this imported water — MWD's share amounts to about 83% of all northern water allotted to Southern California — would be carried through a series of foothill tunnels and pipelines to San Bernardino and Perris Reservoir.

If, by June 30, MWD and other Southland water agencies have failed to agree on the aqueduct's route — high line or foothill tunnels — the state has until Dec. 31 to decide where it should be built.

Voice Comparison

If the amount of water they are purchasing was the only guide, contracting agencies outside MWD would have a small voice, by comparison, in the aqueduct's final routing and construction schedule.

The Antelope Valley-East Kern Water Agency, for example, has contracted for 120,000 acre-feet, compared to 1.5 million for MWD. The San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District will get 90,000 acre-feet, while the contractual amounts of other agencies trickle down to as little as 15,000 acre-feet.

But, as each contract states — a point Warne has emphasized — there must be agreement among all contracting agencies.

In Antelope Valley, where a rash of new industrial and commercial development is expected with the arrival of Feather River water, MWD's interest in a line south of the San Gabriel Mountains is viewed with obvious concern.

"Ideas for a 'strikingly new route' through the Los Angeles Coastal basin (MWD's foothill tunnel plan) can be construed as 'strikingly new subterfuge' for gaining more concentration of water control rather than really providing an expanding water system throughout Southern California," the Antelope Valley Progress Assn. observed.

Opposed By Wilde

Hugo Wilde, general manager of the San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District, says his agency is fighting to preserve the desert high line as planned by the state.

The distributor, which includes the cities of San Bernardino, Colton, Redlands and Rialto, has a population of 250,000 and what it regards as a "firm" contract for Feather River water. Twice, in 1954 and 1957, its electors turned down proposals to annex to MWD.

To Wilde, often an out-

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