

**PRESS RELEASE**  
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## **Campaign Launched to Educate Public about Government Ruling on Native Fish**

**Manteca and Oakdale, Calif. (April 28, 2010)** – The South San Joaquin and Oakdale Irrigation Districts have initiated a public education effort to call attention to the “Biological Opinion” (BO), a federal decision by the National Marine Fisheries Service that affects the operation of the Stanislaus River. The goal of the federal ruling is purportedly to protect the declining population of the Central Valley steelhead, a native fish to the river. The ruling requires the release of more water down the river, a decision both Districts believe will have severe negative impacts on the region.

To raise awareness of the issue and the potential harm to the region, the two irrigation districts have launched the “Save the Stan” public education campaign. The Districts are calling for the California Department of Fish and Game to address the striped bass issue and are seeking a modification to the federal ruling.

There is concern that the BO is based on inadequate studies, analysis and faulty science. Physical science shows the BO will severely affect storage in New Melones Reservoir as well as flows and water temperature in the Stanislaus River. Because of these changes, the implementation of the BO may not produce any significant increase in the steelhead population but may devastate the regional agriculture and curtail recreation on the river and reservoirs.

“The public needs to be aware of the negative impact the BO will have on the river and our community,” said Steve Knell, General Manager of Oakdale Irrigation District. “The river affects everything in our region from agriculture to the economy.”

Knell notes that sending more water down the river and out of the Districts will mean less water for both agriculture and domestic customers, as well as less for recreation in the reservoirs. “This will impact those who boat, fish, camp and enjoy the reservoirs,” he states. “It will result in less agricultural production which will cost the region jobs in all sectors of the economy not just ag,” he added.

“Both Districts have been working to protect the river for years,” said Jeff Shields, General Manager of South San Joaquin Irrigation District. “We have done a lot to date to help with fish flows and have funded many studies and projects on the Stanislaus River. The real problem is predation, not water flow.”

Shields notes that non-native fish like striped bass are preying on the young steelhead. The striped bass were introduced in the river by California Department of Fish and Game for sport fishing. “Until the predation issue is addressed, more water going down the river will not restore the native fish population,” Shields said.

The outreach efforts include a new website that the Districts have jointly launched <http://www.SavetheStan.com>. Various social media outlets including Facebook and Twitter are also dedicated to the effort. Interested persons with questions should contact either the South San Joaquin Irrigation District at (209) 249-4600 or the Oakdale Irrigation District at (209) 847-0341.

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