

Homestead Ponds are a Necessity

Homestead and farm ponds have been a way of life for centuries. In today's world, ponds provide for wildlife, fire suppression and groundwater (& hence stream) recharge, beyond the traditional benefits.

Yet here in California, the State Water Resource Control Board (SWRCB) has made owning a pond onerous. For my wife and I, who created a homestead to live our retirement years on (fixed income), and who built our pond for helping raise food (not cannabis) as well as for all of the above benefits, and who followed the state rules on its creation, now face an annual financial impact that exceeds the value of the water we use (the fees used to be \$100/5 years, now \$100/year). Even more frustrating is that it is the state, through CalFire, that takes the majority of the water.

And when I look around me to our community of ~130 properties, there are probably 80% with ponds, and over 90% of those are diversionary. Yet in a search of SWRCB registrations a few years back I found we were the only ones registered and taxed (annual usage reporting and fees). In a wider survey of the region around me, I estimate that SWRCB registration of ponds is perhaps 1 in 500. If such rules exist, they should be applied equally across all property owners. Equal representation, equal taxation...

I have spoken to SWRCB as well as our regional state assembly person, Dr. Jim Wood, about this situation. I have been told that I must pay such fees regardless, for eternity (or at least as long as I live). The consequences of not reporting the pond's water usage and paying the annual fees is the forced removal of the pond under state oversight and the payment of environmental remediation (including species displaced as a result). But I feel the benefits of our pond to our community (including wildlife) and the state is substantial and removal is not a consideration.

With the persistent droughts and increasing wildfires, ponds should be encouraged throughout the state, with appropriate oversight in their location and construction, of course. And fees for such ponds should be nominal, if they exist at all (and only at the local level, e.g. through the county building department). And if fees are to be charged, then when CalFire takes substantial waters, they should be obligated to replace such.

I am proposing that the state simply acknowledge the existence and usefulness of these (unregistered) homestead ponds, requiring only that the owners pay a one-time registration fee to the county in which the pond lies (with a portion of the fee shared with the state). And that those already registered are no longer charged with annual usage reporting and fees.

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