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Testimony of Vernon Dalton SB 488

The Bishop Creek Dam was constructed in 1912. The project, presently owned and operated by the Pacific Reclamation Water Company, was used to store water for irrigation. The original intent of the project was a speculative venture by New York real estate interests designed to stimulate land sales. The development did not occur and the project subsequently dwindled to an irrigation project with limited use.

In May of 1943 the State Engineer imposed a water gauge height limitation on the structure of 55 feet. Subsequently, the Pacific Reclamation Water Company controlled the water level below this elevation.

A dam safety inspection was prepared by the Corp of Engineers for the structure in May of 1979 as part of the National Program for Inspection of Dams. The dam was classified as intermediate in size (80 feet high) with a hazard classification of one (high hazard). The dam was described as an "unsafe structure" as a result of the dam safety inspection in 1979 and it was recommended that the dam not be filled above the level (55 feet) previously recommended by the State Engineer. The Pacific Reclamation Water Company complied fully with this recommendation.

Because of a lack of storage, the facility eventually ceased to be a viable irrigation project. The dam continued to function as a flood control structure in that it detained the peak runoff during storm events.

The outlet gate became bound and inoperable, partially open, early in 1984 because of limited use and deterioration. With the gate partially open, the runoff events of 1984 ponded water to a depth of about 57 feet. As a result, the dam developed a leak through the embankment. The primary area of the leak was at a height of about 42 feet. The dam eventually drained down without catastrophic failure.

Except for routine inspection of the structure, there has been no work on the Bishop Creek Dam since the 1984 failure. The facility continues to deteriorate.

We are now in the process of obtaining funds to do the required studies required to apply for grants to refurbish the facility to again impound water, the reason for Senate Bill 488.

As far as I can determine money will have to be spent on the dam to make it safe in the future, either to breach it or reconstruct it for a usable storage facility. The reconstruction would provide many other benefits such as recreation, fishing and the improved agricultural production, which would raise tax revenues.

The benefits of a restored Bishop Creek dam are many. I ask you to approve Senate Bill 488.

If there are questions, I will try to answer them.

EXHIBIT F Senate Committee on Finance

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