

Show Transcript
Deconstructing Dinner
Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY
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Title: The California Drought and Fox News

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Jon Steinman: And welcome to Deconstructing Dinner produced in Nelson, British Columbia at Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY. This show is heard weekly on radio stations around the world including KRBS Radio Birdstreet 107.1 FM Oroville, California. I'm Jon Steinman.

Today, we travel *to* the state of California where 50% of all fresh fruits and vegetables consumed in Canada *and* the United States are produced. Beyond fresh produce, California is also a *major* producer of dairy, olives and nuts, and the list of foods goes on.

But how secure *is* this reliance we all have on Californian food, certainly for most Canadians and Americans, the *distance* food is traveling *from* California is almost laughable. But food *miles* aside, California has just endured its 3rd year of *drought* leaving an already fragile agricultural and seafood economy much more susceptible.

On today's episode we learn about the challenges facing California's water supply and how this might impact food production. Lending their voice *to* the show will be Pete Lucero of the United States Department of the Interior's Bureau of Reclamation, we'll hear from Doug Obegi of the Natural Resources Defense Council and from Zeke Grader of the Institute for Fisheries Resources.

And as we often do here on the show, we'll *also* be spending some notable time deconstructing the *media* and how some of America's *largest* networks and newspapers are communicating a pretty misleading and inaccurate message *about* this drought and its impacts on Californian farmers.

increase music and fade out

the Association of California Water Agencies ad: Two-thirds of California residents had no real idea where their tap water comes from, and they are largely unaware of the growing crisis affecting water supplies in our state. The Association of California Water Agencies is working to change that through its state-wide awareness program. (*sound of a water drop*) California's water -- a crisis we can't ignore.

JS: And that is just *one* example of the many awareness campaigns underway throughout the state to alert Californians to this water crisis. That one being a segment of audio from a video produced by the Association of California Water Agencies, and this next one, from *another* video produced by Paul Pfotenhauer for the University of California at Davis.

the University of California at Davis ad: California has always been thirsty for water. There simply isn't enough to go around. Northern California has it, the South and the Central Valley need it, and the fish and wildlife depend on it. Three years of drought in California has been costing California dearly. Richard Howitt, an Agriculture Resource Economist, says water restrictions could mean up to 800 million dollars in lost income and force 25,000 people out of work in the San Joaquin and Tulare Valleys this year.

Richard Howitt: It's devastating for the life of market in the valley. This is a labour market that doesn't have much leeway because they've been hit with a construction slowdown for other sorts of manual labour jobs, and they are really reliant on these farm jobs, particularly in these small communities.

the U of C at Davis ad: Despite spring rains, California remains mired in a serious drought.

Woman: Over the last three years the runoff has very much below normal. And the runoff is sort of the best indicator of where we are at in terms of drought. It's not just the rain and snow but, over a whole year, how much we actually get in those river basins. And two years ago, the water here had 53 percent of normal, last year 58 percent of normal runoff, and our projection for this year is only 70 percent of normal. So we're not working our way out of that hole.

JS: Now certainly the magnitude of this *third* year of drought in California is significant and has mobilized all levels of government and water service agencies to respond with assertive campaigns and action. But there has also been a response by *some* American media that, as far as Deconstructing Dinner is concerned, requires some *critical* attention. And of those media who have chosen to cover California's drought and its impact on agriculture, is Fox News alongside their parent company News Corporation and their other media outlets – most notably, the Wall Street Journal.

Now Canadian listeners might not be as familiar as our American listeners with the aggressive campaigning that Fox News has taken on since President Barack Obama was elected into office. There's really no question that Fox News is committed to doing whatever it possibly can to undermine the current presidency and in some cases have become full-on *activists*; helping organize and advocate protests, rallies and campaigns all of which are designed to *challenge* the President and any federal decision. But within this dramatic change of tone at Fox News has been the blatant politicizing of issues that in many cases has Fox grasping with such intensity, that many gaping holes in their logic have presented themselves for some overdue *deconstructing*. While many North

Americans might not view Fox News as “fair and balanced” as they purport to be, the fact of the matter is there are *many* Americans who receive the *bulk* of their information *from* this network and with the Wall Street Journal now being owned *by* Fox’s parent company, it’s no surprise that the Wall Street Journal has *also* been communicating the same questionable messages about the California drought.

And so according to Sean Hannity – a daily commentator on Fox News and a popular voice on the radio through his nationally-syndicated show, the California drought and its economic impacts on farmers is *not* the fault of three years of low run-off but instead, is the fault of President Barack Obama – an interesting approach at politicizing a multi-faceted issue.

Sean Hannity: Between environmentalists and whether or not the farmers in the Central Valley here have water, ladies and gentlemen, this has become a dustbowl. And we came here tonight with a message for Washington and President Barack Obama. Please for the sake of the farmers, where unemployment is now near 40 percent, please turn this water on, now!

President Barack Obama: Hope is in the future. We are hungry for change. We will transform this country. We are ready to believe again!

Sean Hannity (music playing in background): All of those promises, all of that hope, and yet in the San Joaquin Valley of California, hope doesn’t spring eternal. This land was once considered the bread basket of America. Roughly 12 percent of our nation’s agricultural output came from this valley between Bakersfield and Sacramento, but everything has now changed. (*sound of dripping water*) Today, their water is gone, shut off by the government.

And the same people whose cheers of hope and change echoed from this Valley all the way to Washington had been abandoned in favour of a fish barely large enough to fit in the palm of your hand. The scene here today is more reminiscent of the dustbowl of the 1930s. Farms that once fed the nation are barren. The parched and cracked earth, it’s right out of the grapes of wrath.

JS: Sean Hannity of Fox News from September 2009. Now we *could* spend the next hour deconstructing the *music* of that segment, and the ecclesiastical tone of that production, but as we’ve heard, according to Fox News the drought in California is the result of the “water being shut *off* by the federal government.” We also heard Sean Hannity refer to “environmentalists” and a *fish* as *also* being the culprits of the drought, and what Hannity is *referring* to is the delta smelt, a fish listed as an endangered species. In the past few years the Natural Resources Defense Council (the NRDC) has been at the forefront of ensuring that the fish be protected and these efforts have resulted in a reduction in the amount of water being received by some Californian farmers.

Lending his voice to Deconstructing Dinner is the NRDC’s Doug Obegi – a Staff Attorney of their Western Water Project. Doug spoke to us from San Francisco.

Doug Obegi: The Natural Resources Defense Council has been one of the most prominent environmental groups in the United States for several decades now. And for at least the past 15 or 20 years, we really had a focus on water issues in California. Looking particularly at California's Bay-Delta Estuary, which is the hub of the water export system in California that allows water to be exported from Northern California, where most of the rainfall and snowfall occurs to Central California and Southern California, which are much more arid. However, the water supply system in the delta also affects the flows of our two largest rivers, the San Joaquin and Sacramento, which come together in the delta and thus affect our salmon and other native fish species. So, part of the challenge for the past 20 years that NRDC has been very engaged in is how to balance the needs for water exports with the needs to sustain our native plants and animals in the delta.

JS: The history of California's water distribution system is a fascinating one and also necessary to understand in order to critically analyze the message that Fox News is spreading to its American viewers.

Doug Obegi: California has to export a fair amount of water from the delta to San Joaquin Valley and to Southern California because there is very little rainfall in Southern California. Most of the rain and the snow occurs in the North and flows through the Sacramento or San Joaquin rivers down to the delta. Several decades ago, California started designing a massive engineering program, one of the largest, if not the very largest, water diversion projects in the world that enable us to move approximately six million acre feed of water, enough water to cover an acre of land with a foot deep water to the farms and cities in Southern and Central California. And this water supply system has done great wonders in expanding the area of the state that can be developed but it also had significant adverse impacts on salmon fisheries and other fisheries in the State.

JS: Now into its third year of drought, Californians are waking up to the excessive amounts of water that have historically been allocated for the agricultural lands of the Central Valley. With 41 percent of water destined for agriculture and 11 percent destined for municipal purposes that leaves 48 percent of *all* available water to maintain natural ecosystems. Of the wildlife impacted by this and other human impacts on the natural environment, we find the delta smelt - an almost translucent 2-3 inch fish that is endemic to the Sacramento Delta. The delta smelt was listed in 1993 as *threatened* under the California Endangered Species Act and Federal Endangered Species Act. In 2008, the California Fish and Game Commission uplisted the delta smelt to *endangered*. Also on the list of endangered species in the delta is Chinook salmon.

The Natural Resources Defense Council has taken an active role to ensure that the critical state of these fish be protected.

Doug Obegi: Delta smelt and winter run Chinook salmon and spring run Chinook salmon were all listed as threatened or endangered species back in the 1990s. And in 1992, NRDC and other organizations were very instrumental in passing federal legislations

called the Central Valley Project Improvement Act, which was intended to improve conditions in the delta for these native fish species, and they made a federal policy of making environmental protection in the delta more important and equally important was water deliveries. So back in the early 90s, water diversions, water exports from the delta were reduced, and we saw populations of salmon rebound, which meant that our salmon fisheries were really healthy for several years. However, in the late 1990s and over the last decade or so, water exports from the delta steadily crept up, and our populations of salmon and delta smelt and other fish species in the delta that either live in the delta or migrated to the delta all plummeted to historic lows. So in 2004 and 2005, NRDC as part of the coalition of sport commercial fishing groups, conservation groups, and the Winnemem Wintu tribe, a Native American tribe in Northern California, filed suit over the plan to allow even more exports of water from the delta fearing that it will jeopardize the future of the salmon fisheries and indeed the existence of salmon and other native fish. We won those cases in 2007 and 2008, and the federal courts ordered reductions in water exports from those historically high levels that we saw in the early part of this decade.

JS: Now those reductions in water export levels ordered by the federal court *have* had impacts on the amount of water available to some farmers in the San Joaquin Valley of California. As mentioned and heard earlier, this court order and its resulting impact caught the attention of Fox News and in particular popular commentator Sean Hannity. And while Deconstructing Dinner would normally applaud *any* media covering the plight of farmers, this *particular* coverage requires some scrutiny, because instead of looking at the *whole* picture of what has contributed to these agricultural water shortages such as the natural drought itself, or the state of the agricultural economy, or the out-of-date water distribution system, Sean Hannity has instead turned this drought into a *political* issue and insists that the water shortages incurred *by* these farmers are *solely*, the fault of the Federal Government and President Barack Obama.

Sean Hannity: Farmers in California are losing their land, their crops, and their livelihood, all because of a 2-inch fish. Ainsley Earhardt brings us this special investigation.

Ainsley Earhardt: California's Central Valley is considered by many to be the richest and the most productive farmland in the nation. But this land is being threatened by the small, harmless, looking minnow called the delta smelt. Recently, it is landed on the endangered species list, prompting a federal court to shut down vital pumps to farmers to help preserve it.

Sarah Woolf is a spokesperson for the Westlands Water District, a company that oversees the manmade complicated water delivery system in the Central Valley.

Ainsley Earhardt: How many years has this been the process?

Sarah Woolf: It was completed in 1968.

Ainsley Earhardt: Okay, so decades.

Sarah Woolf: Yes.

Ainsley Earhardt: All the farmers along all this land, that's two-thirds of the state of California have depended on water to grow their crops. But the water is turned off here so none of these farmers can expect to get any water.

Sarah Woolf: That's correct.

Ainsley Earhardt: The pumps were turned off after environmentalists won a federal court case, but at least one lawmaker in Washington is fighting back.

Devin Nunes: You're spending one trillion dollars, and you won't put in what provision it would create 60,000 jobs. This is an insult to my constituency.

What we have today is a manmade drought brought on by laws, passed by the Congress, to where we are taking the bread basket of the world, and starving it of water to save little fish which is outrageous.

JS: That's Republican Congressman Devin Nunes heard on Sean Hannity's show on Fox News. Devin Nunes has actively joined in the fight to overturn the *ruling* that was enacted to protect the delta smelt. Like Fox News, Nunes has been also spreading the message that the resulting water reductions are the sole reason for the drought and has ignored the other factors that need to also be considered. The tagline of the drought affecting farmers as being "man-made" has also been used on Fox News and their sister newspaper The Wall Street Journal. On September 2nd, 2009, the Wall Street Journal published an article titled "California's Man-Made Drought – The Green War Against San Joaquin Valley Farmers." The web page *for* that article was also titled, "EPA regulations cause drought in California."

Now this very narrow and inaccurate message being communicated *by* these influential American media is in need of some critical deconstructing. And so Deconstructing Dinner invited Pete Lucero onto the show. Pete is the Public Affairs Officer of the Bureau of Reclamation – an agency of the United States Department of the Interior. The Bureau is in the 17 western states and the goal of reclamation is to provide water and power to those states. As for California, the Bureau operates 20 dams and reservoirs to help provide and deliver water for agriculture, urban use and maintaining natural habitat.

Pete Lucero spoke to Deconstructing Dinner from his Sacramento office and he responds to this message that the drought affecting farmers in the San Joaquin Valley is a "regulatory one."

Pete Lucero: This drought that we're under right now has been three years in the making. We're three years of critically dry years in California, which has caused reduction or depletion of the waters we have in storage. That storage water resides typically in our

reservoirs and carries over year to year. Because of the lack of rainfall and run-off over the last two or three years, we've had to dip into our storage water to the point where our storage capacity, our storage availability beginning of 2009 was practically zero. We just had a really, really low carry-over year, and because 2009 was another dry year, we've had to try to compensate or we've had to try to meet the competing needs for water in California with low storage. Now, the regulatory drought issue comes in where we also have had some reduction in available water simply because we have to protect, but through the Endangered Species Protection Act, the delta smelt, and salmon, and other endangered species. We had to provide water to assure that these species continue to survive. And that's part of our charge as well, so we've a lot of competing interest for the water. The issue of regulatory drought is one that some have been saying. The larger reason for why we are not delivering water some will say is because of the Environmental Species Act Regulations. That's not in fact the truth. Probably one quarter of the water that wasn't delivered in 2009 was the result of the Endangered Species Act. But fully three quarters of the water that may not have been fully delivered in 2009 over normal years was the result of the fact that we just didn't have enough water in the system.

JS: Pete Lucero of the US Bureau of Reclamation. Now the one *number* that Pete mentions and which requires some closer attention is the one-quarter figure – that is that one-quarter of the water *not* being received by farmers in the San Joaquin valley is as a result of these endangered species protections. The other three-quarters of that water shortage? Well, from *other* factors having nothing to do with the federal court order – most notably, the *actual* drought. But that again, has *not* prevented Fox News from using that one-quarter water reduction as a political campaign to try and undermine the Federal Government and President Barack Obama.

Ainsley Earhardt: Sad story, you're one of the only ones covering this too, Sean. This is San Joaquin Valley. We are about three hours north of L.A. It's called the bread basket of America because most of the fruits and vegetables and nuts that you're buying in the grocery store are grown here in this area. But the controversy here is 30-40 thousand farmers and workers out here have lost their jobs, and it's all because of that 2-inch minnow that you were mentioning, Sean.

JS: All because of that 2-inch minnow says Fox News Ainsley Earhardt of the drought facing California farmers.

Now anyone who watches Fox News on a regular basis is likely aware as I know we are at Deconstructing Dinner of the parade of criticism coming out of that network of President Barack Obama. It seems every news story can somehow be turned into the President's fault. The recent fatal shooting at an army base in Ft. Hood, Texas as an example, is, according to Sean Hannity, also the fault of the President.

soundbite

JS: This is Deconstructing Dinner. On today's episode we're exploring the severe drought that has hit California and having now endured a third year *of* it, food production in some areas is being notably affected. But as is a secondary focus of the show today, American media like Fox News and the Wall Street Journal are communicating a very single-issue and thereby misleading story, apparently as a *tool* to use this drought politically, as an attack on the U.S. government and more specifically, President Barack Obama – who has become an ongoing target of the Fox News channel.

Now it's not new for Deconstructing Dinner to be critical of the media, after all this show was formed in an effort to provide a more holistic picture of the most critical issues facing our food supply. But turning our attention to Fox News carries a different level of examination than usual. You see much of Fox News is not news at all, and is instead a heavily focused parade of commentators who refer to themselves as "news." The most noticeable effort, the 24-hour-a-day Fox News logo spinning in the bottom left-hand corner of the screen, signaling to their viewers that what they are watching is indeed "news."

The fictitious nature of Fox even goes so far as to use old video footage of rallies to outright lie to their viewers of how many people attended a more recent rally. Just last week on November 5th, as an example, Fox News was caught using footage from a larger September rally on Capitol Hill and labelling it as the *November* protest to Health Care Reform which was significantly of a smaller turnout.

But as for their drought coverage, in their efforts to politicize that, Fox News alongside Republican Congressman Devin Nunes have used the argument that this drought is only about one thing, farmers versus fish. In focus is the 2007 and 2008 Federal Court order requiring reductions in water exports to the San Joaquin Valley to protect the endangered delta smelt. This year, similar protections were issued for the endangered Chinook salmon. With groups like the Natural Resources Defense Council and fisheries organizations being at the forefront of ensuring these protections are in place, Fox News has used this farmers versus fish argument to communicate to their audience that the issue is as simple as supporting one group versus the other.

Sean Hannity: Joining us now is our own Ainsley Earhardt. I can't believe this because of this little fish, as many as 80,000 people are going to lose jobs. They're shutting off water for farms that have been there, what, generations?

Ainsley Earhardt: Generations, third generation farmers, Sean. Their grandfathers were out there; blood, sweat, and tears making sure these crops are going to grow so you and I would have fruits and vegetables. And they're shutting it down because they think the minnow could get caught or does get caught in the pumps. So now they're pumping the water out in the Pacific Ocean instead of streaming it down to the farmers who live in the Valley.

Sean Hannity: And they're all losing their jobs.

Ainsley Earhardt: They're all losing their jobs. We're talking about Representative Nunes says up to 80,000 jobs could be lost, so, we're talking about lots of jobs. Well, what about the food bank? The line was wrapped around the block because people don't have food.

Sean Hannity: And all they've got to do is turn the water back on.

Ainsley Earhardt: Right. That's all they have to do.

Sean Hannity: That's crazy.

Ainsley Earhardt: And now we're going to have to get our fruits and vegetables from other countries, Mexico and from elsewhere.

Sean Hannity: Might as well get our oil and everything else. I tell you this is madness. This is madness.

Ainsley Earhardt: It's fish versus families.

Sean Hannity: It really is.

Ainsley Earhardt: They're choosing the fish.

Sean Hannity: They're choosing the fish. 2-inch fish.

Ainsley Earhardt: 2-inch minnow.

Sean Hannity: Exactly.

JS: Sean Hannity and Ainsley Earhardt of Fox News. Invited to respond to these Fish versus Farmers messages is again, the Natural Resources Defense Council's Doug Obegi.

Doug Obegi: I think the fish versus people myth, it really is a myth. When you look at what has happened as a result of the increased water export from the delta, California's salmon fisheries has been closed for the first time in the State's history for the past two years. We simply didn't have enough salmon coming back. Every year we release about 32 million salmon smelts from hatcheries as well as native production. And historically, we had a million or 2 million salmon come into the Central Valley to spawn each year. This past year we had 66,000 fish return, and as a result we had the fishery completely closed, which has cost the state several thousand jobs and hundreds of millions of dollars in economic income. It also affects fisheries off of Oregon because Oregon gets about half of their fish from the Central Valley. It's really the mainstay of many fishing communities up and down the coast. And so, whether it's delta farmers, farmers in the delta who support these Endangered Species Act protections, because it protects water quality and ensures there is adequate water in the delta for them to use, whether it's salmon fishermen from Northern California, from Central California, coastlines, or

recreational fishermen in the Central Valley, there is broad support for these environmental protections and really thousands, tens of thousands of jobs that depend on a healthy delta.

So this really is not a fish versus people. What it is, is a challenging situation. Three years of drought has meant that water supplies are short and in the midst of a drought, everyone's advocating for their positions using whatever metaphors seem appropriate, but when we look at where California gets its food, it is critically important that we sustain our farms and our fisheries. Even despite three years of drought, and environmental protections, California is going to have near record levels of tomato crops and rice crops and numerous other crops. And indeed, we have really been able to enjoy the bounty of California's farms throughout this drought and despite environmental protections. There's one thing that has been missing from California's dinner plates and that's locally caught wild salmon. And I think all of us really feel that we should be able to have both salmon and broccoli, or salmon and lettuce grown in California. And we can have both.

JS: Doug Obegi. Now because Fox News has only chosen to focus on the delta smelt as the culprit for water reductions to some California farmers, Fox believes anyone who *does not* support overturning the federal court order is anti-farming. In what was supposed to *appear* as an effort by Fox's Sean Hannity to hear the other side of the story, Hannity invited Zeke Grader onto his show. Zeke is the Executive Director of the Institute for Fisheries Resources and he was interviewed live via satellite. While Sean Hannity sat in front of a rally of farmers that Fox News helped organize, Zeke Grader spoke to Hannity from San Francisco.

As Zeke's location is announced to the crowd of farmers, you can hear the disdain that so many Americans have for anything San Franciscan – a hatred that Fox News is well known for promoting.

Sean Hannity: In spite of the terrible, terrible crisis facing this area, there are actually environmentalists out there who are still defending this 2-inch minnow, and I'm joined by one of them right now, on remote from San Francisco, California. Here is the Executive Director of the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Association, Zeke Grader. Zeke, I'm sitting here, and I'm meeting farmers that have farmed for generations, and they can't farm any longer. I'm meeting farmers that want to work and workers. This affects 38 million people, and they can't get the water, and you going to tell these people that you're going to keep the water off to defend this little delta smelt fish. Can you explain why?

Zeke Grader: Sean, I think what you have to realize is we're not just talking about the delta smelt. We're also talking about salmon. These salmon are food, they provide jobs for people. You need to come up and provide some balance here. I want you to come up to the north coast, place to where I'm from Fort Bragg, not where your studios are from Sean, or come to Eureka and you visit the unemployed fishermen there and give this some balance. Because let me tell you, the delta smelt will not cause a problem for those farmers.

JS: In order to move beyond some of these childish tactics of Fox News and to learn more about how this drought and other factors have impacted California's salmon fishery, Deconstructing Dinner invited Zeke Grader onto the show. He spoke to us from San Francisco.

Zeke Grader: At present there has been no commercial salmon fishery for the last two years. And the reason for that was a steep decline in our production of Central Valley salmon stocks. Now the Central Valley salmon come out of the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers. These rivers are fed by the Sierra snowpack and tributaries to that and it basically creates the second largest salmon run at the Columbian Snake system in the lower 48 States. So it's very important, I think it pales a little bit in comparison to the Fraser River, but certainly is one of the West Coast more important salmon production systems. What happens is that this system comes in and meets the two rivers. They meet near Sacramento and the delta. And this is probably the largest, combined with San Francisco Bay, the largest estuary on the West Coast of North and South America. It's a very large, historically very productive estuary, and the rivers meet there, and they go through this estuary, the delta connected to San Francisco Bay, and then the waters flow out the golden gate. And it's important not just for salmon, but for the production of Dungeness crab, we have the largest Herring fishery or at least did on the West Coast, south of British Columbia. And historically, it was also a system that produces large amount of shrimp and oysters.

JS: While the area was *once* productive habitat for Chinook salmon, much has changed in recent years, and Zeke Grader explains.

Zeke Grader: Inflow to this estuary now is being diverted, most of it is going south to provide for agriculture and the very arid area of the San Joaquin Valley. But it has turned it into a major agriculture production area and in some of the water also ends up in Southern California, some of it even in the deserts to create golf courses of all things. This is the system these salmon exist in, and what happens when too much water is taken out of this system, the estuary itself begins collapsing and the salmon themselves can become entrained, that is trapped in the pumps, or they become disoriented, the young salmon which think they are moving west to the sea end up moving south to these pumps because they go with the flow, and as a result their being lost. So, we've seen in the past, particularly in the late 80s, early 90s, where we've gone from record levels of salmon production as a result of some very wet years, to very low levels of production when excessive amounts of water are being pumped from this estuary. So what happens in the mid part of this century, the mid part of this decade, I should say, the state and the federal water agencies came forward with plans to take even more water, and in fact, they did. We had record levels of pumping, and our salmon stocks as a result just collapsed. Now, the federal government try to blame at first on ocean conditions but ocean conditions couldn't explain it because it we had not see salmon stocks from other rivers along our coast. The decline was nowhere as extreme so it's pretty obvious that the flows were critical here. And of course when the flows are removed it also creates higher concentrations of pollution. There's a really problem with this system with those

municipal and agricultural pollution and when there are low flows, we don't have that dilution factor is it becomes more deadly to the fish. Moreover, it tends to make the system much more hospitable for invasive species, which can also then harm the native salmon stock and other native fish. So, this has been the reason that in the last two years, we didn't oppose the closing because there simply were no fish, for us not having a fishery not just for California, but also Oregon lost most of their fish as a result because about half of their production in a normal year is based on these Central Valley salmon.

JS: Zeke Grader of the Institute for Fisheries Resources. Now despite the integral nature of the Chinook salmon to the health of the delta ecosystem, Fox News has not provided much room at all on their broadcasts to hear this side of this very complex story and instead has stood by their message that the environmental protections of the fish are the only reason why farmers are short on water. As heard earlier, Fox's Sean Hannity invited Zeke Grader onto his show and Zeke shares with *us*, how that all began.

Zeke Grader: Well, it was a set up, I have to admit that I've never heard of Sean Hannity because I never watch Fox News. I watch Fox Sports but I had really basically ignored him. As far as I could tell from a couple times I just surfed the channel, I could tell it was not news. It was really just a far right wing shbiel coming out of Rupert Murdoch's folks, and I was called and I asked, if it is going to be an intelligent discussion, quiet no shouting, then we can talk about the issues, I said I'd be glad to do that. In fact, that's what I was promised. Of course, they didn't adhere to their promise when I saw what was going on as I was in the studio waiting to what I thought was going to be interviewed. It was pretty obvious that it was going to be a shouting match. What we were thinking was a cat hanging is that I was brought in to be the villain of the night. I guess that where Hannity and our governor and some of the congressional people all sitting there with the big rally of folks that they had stirred up in Fresno complaining about a 2-inch minnow causing them a loss of jobs and loss of income and blaming it all on the delta smelt. And then they had me there to try and defend the decisions that were made to provide at least some water to prevent these fish from extinction, and with the crowd busy shouting so it was not an interview. It turned out to be basically a shouting match and I suggested to Hannity that he come and visit these fishing communities and see what's happened to people that are out of work where there is 100 percent unemployment because of what happened to the salmon and of course he refused and I don't think he's got the courage to do it.

Sean Hannity: This is about farmers that are starving, and you seem to care more about a 2-inch minnow than you do about these people that have farmed for generations and you don't seem to have any concern about them, why? I want to know why.

Zeke Grader: Sean, I care about them, but neither that 2-inch minnow nor those salmon caused the problem. Now listen, and listen carefully Sean. There are probably about... Listen, there's a drought this year and those very same growers are selling out their water to Southern California. One of their companies there just made 77 million dollars by selling their water to Southern California putting people in that Valley out of work.

Sean Hannity: Hey Zeke...

Zeke Grader: Don't tell me about the delta smelt, Sean.

Sean Hannity: Hey Zeke, you're going to blame these farmers because they don't have the water. That food feeds all of America. You're going to look into the camera and blame them? Try to explain that one.

Zeke Grader: Sean, the problem is the delta smelt did not cause those water shortages. Listen, and listen carefully because apparently the problem is...

Sean Hannity: Wait a minute. The problem is that the water has been turned off because environmental wackos and extremists like you care more about fish than they do about people. And I just want to know, how did you get your priorities so screwed up in life? What happened to you?

Jon Steinman: Fox News' Sean Hannity interviewing Zeke Grader of the Institute for Fisheries Resources in September 2009.

This is Deconstructing Dinner – a syndicated weekly radio show and podcast produced in Nelson, British Columbia at Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY. I'm Jon Steinman. Today's broadcast is archived on-line at deconstructingdinner.ca and posted under the November 12th 2009 episode.

On today's broadcast we're examining the severe drought that California has incurred now for three years. With 41 percent of available water in the State being used for agricultural purposes, clearly this drought will have impacts and has on farmers and food production. But with 48 percent of that water going to maintain the *natural* systems that existed long before water was first diverted and exported, that already-significant reduction in water available to local ecosystems has become even more dangerously low. As one of the many resulting impacts, endangered species of fish have become at even greater risk. In 2007 and 2008, a Federal Court issued an order to reduce water exports to areas of the San Joaquin Valley to protect the endangered delta smelt. Further reductions came in 2009 to protect the endangered Chinook salmon, and any further reductions to an already severe drought does leave an already shaky agricultural community in an even more vulnerable position. But while everyone should be seeking to stand behind farmers and support their challenges, this issue is of course *much* bigger than just the plight of farmers. This water crisis affects municipalities, fishermen, ecosystems and essentially is a very complex and interconnected concern that raises a long list of questions ranging from irrigation practices, to what food is being produced, to most importantly, should an entire continent be reliant on one valley for 50 percent of our fruits and vegetables.

But as heard in that last clip, American media like Fox News – a network who *purports* to be “news,” is only seeing this as a single-issue. As heard earlier on the show, it appears that this single-issue approach has become an opportunity for them, Fox News,

as they do so often, to criticize President Barack Obama. After all the court order to reduce water exports to the Valley to protect these fish was a federal one.

And when networks like Fox News allow themselves to be exposed for such disregard for reliable information, there is one show that has become a pretty ardent critic and that's The Daily Show with Jon Stewart.

Jon Stewart: Surely environmentalists must be to blame here somewhere.

Sean Hannity: This is what this comes down to, no water for the farmers because of this fish, is that what it is? This fish here?

Jon Stewart: By the way be sure to check out Sean Hannity's new children's book, one fish, two fish, red fish, boo boo fish. Now, I assume the salient fact here is by drawing too much water from the reservoir, salt water would come up river, destroying the habitat of that fish, and that fish is important, right?

Sean Hannity: They have all this water that they're sending to the ocean rather than to the farms because of the little delta smelt, this little 2-inch delta smelt fish. They're actually environmentalists out there who are still defending this 2-inch minnow. You're going to keep the water off to defend this little delta smelt fish?

Jon Stewart: Stupid small fish. Part of the stupid food chain. Small things should never be preserved. You want to save the whales? Kill the plankton and the krill then the whales will have more room.

Jon Steinman: Jon Stewart wasted no time to do his *own* comedic deconstructing of Sean Hannity's interview with Zeke Grader.

Jon Stewart: Wait, if we destroy the lower remnant food chain, larger fish may be hurt, which may hurt commercial fishermen who are all part of hardworking Americans who want the government off their back. Who will speak for them?

Zeke Grader: We're not just talking about the delta smelt, we're also talking about the salmon. These salmon are food, they provide jobs for people. There's a drought this year.

Jon Stewart: Boo salmon boo. And boo you, the guy who wasn't smart enough to get Sean Hannity to defend this industry at the expense of a different industry. It just makes sense. Real people eat food that's grown. But you and your fish, oh pardon me, do you happen to have any frozen fish sticks?

Jon Steinman: The Daily Show's Jon Stewart. As Fox News clearly offered very little time to Zeke Grader to speak to the threats that the drought has had *on* California's salmon fishery, here again is Zeke speaking to Deconstructing Dinner.

Zeke Grader: Salmon populations here have historically encountered and survived droughts in the past. We've had droughts sometimes that last nearly a decade. What made the situation intolerable for the salmon is that we have these droughts, the level of pumping, that is, the amount of water being diverted from the delta and its tributary rivers and streams increases so that very seldom have we seen agriculture take any *real* cuts in water delivery. Instead, it's been the fish that has taken the hit. Now, there has been a lot of things, obviously, that were put out on the Fox Network and a great deal of misinformation out there about what's happened to agriculture, but in fact, agriculture for the most part has gotten all of its water deliveries and most of it, there has been very little in the way of cutbacks in agriculture and in fact, this year in the Fresno area we had a record production level of tomatoes for example. Where the problem has been is that in California, they're under a water law is that the senior and junior water rights holders basically has access to water when there is surplus available and not used by the senior water rights holder. We have a number of these junior water rights holders that are very well politically connected, that have put in permanent crops such as the orchards and vineyards, which cannot be fallowed during dry years, and the minute that they have been cutback in their water they've been screaming. Well, they put these crops in knowing full well that their water supply was tenuous. What's exacerbated the situation is we've had some of these farmers that are getting this water that either had senior water right's holders or those that were using ground water have turned around and sold their water to Southern California developers including development that are going into the Mojave Desert, building things such as golf courses which makes absolutely no sense and so what's being put at risk by all of this has been our coastal fishing communities and the fish themselves.

Jon Steinman: Zeke Grader of the Institute for Fisheries Resources. Also lending their voice to expand on these many issues that are facing farmers and farm communities – issues that go beyond just the environmental protections for endangered salmon and delta smelt, is Doug Obegi of the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Doug Obegi: As an environmental group, NRDC is not really in the best position to be able to recommend broad social policies to sustain jobs, particularly outside of environmental concerns. But, it is worth noting that three years of drought, global recession, a huge drop in housing construction as a result of the foreclosure crisis and mortgage crisis, and numerous other factors, even the drop in dairy prices and some commodity prices dropping have all adversely affected farming. NRDC and many other environmental groups really want to sustain farming in California. We may sometimes disagree with how some farming practices are done, but I think we all recognize the importance of farming in California, and maintaining healthy abundance of food that's locally grown, sustaining local communities in terms of jobs, and providing healthy benefits. No one wants to see huge tracks of new homes built on former farmland. We want to sustain farming. But, that doesn't mean that farming doesn't have to change and there are many global factors as well as local factors that affects farming, and water certainly is a part of that, but it's not the only thing. There may be some who want to blame everything on the delta smelt. A realistic look at the picture, and indeed some of the more recent economic data that's been done on the impacts of the drought and the

Endangered Species Act show that the impacts are not as severe as some may have suggested. But by in large, the Endangered Species Act and protections for salmon and delta smelt are not the cause of widespread unemployment across the large swaths of California.

Jon Steinman: With all of these factors affecting Californian farmers having been *ignored* by Fox News again, comedian Jon Stewart wasted no time to point out yet some more missed information, that is that the water distribution system in California was designed decades ago, by previous administrations, yet for Sean Hannity and Fox News, the drought facing farmers today is solely the fault of Fox's enemy number 1, Barack Obama.

Jon Stewart: How did he let his almost comically oversized head to the very real drought problems that these farmers are facing? And you won't believe who figured out who was to blame.

Sean Hannity: There's a very, very simple solution to the problem. Farmers want to work hard, they don't want a government hand out, and we have a message to Washington tonight. Mr. President, turn the water on now!

Jon Stewart: That is so racist! Oh, just because the president is black, you think you can make it rain! Make it rain, Mr. President. So racist. Sorry, what's that? I'm sorry, he blames the Government for not letting farmers turn on water for their crops because of the drought conditions that have lowered the reservoir levels. I see. The construction of that reservoir was originally handed out in the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of 1935. Do you remember, it was authorized as part of the 1935 Singles Bill allocating 500 million dollars, "Trans-mountain water diversion and irrigation." Or to put that in layman's terms, the government should stop meddling in the business of the farmers who would actually be still living in the desert if not for government meddling. History! History! History hurts my brain.

Jon Steinman: The Daily Show with Jon Stewart. Leading us into another area of concern to "deconstruct" here on the show, was the comment heard there of Fox's Sean Hannity demanding that the U.S. Government, "turn the water on." This has been echoed on his show throughout most of his coverage of the issue over the past few months. But is the demand to, "turn the water on" accurate? Responding once again is Pete Lucero of the United States Bureau of Reclamation.

Pete Lucero: Well, that's another somewhat of a misstatement. The pumps have been on, the pumps are consistently on. We go through periods where we may have reduce to restrict some of the pumping in 2009 there was maybe two days that we weren't able to pump because we were in a situation where the delta smelt were at jeopardy and we had to curtail pumping for a couple of days, but we will pump, typically, every single day, may not be at full capacity but it'll be pumping. And so since June 30th of this year, we have been pumping consistently at practically full pumping capabilities at both ours and the State pumping stations because the restrictions are only there during certain portions

of the year when the delta smelt are either coming in to the bay or leaving the bay and when they're not in the vicinity of the pumps we don't have any restrictions that are put upon us. So we have been consistently pumping, the mantra of turn on the pumps, turn on the pumps. All you have to do is turn on the pumps is really not the actual problem here. The problem as we would have to describe it for those who say that is, is that those pumps may not be running at full capacity because of the delta smelt, but we are required by law to protect the delta smelt. It's not an arbitrary thing for us, it's not something we can do different. We are required to do certain actions as a result of the Endangered Species Act.

Jon Steinman: Again, despite the situation as Pete Lucero describes, Fox News continues to spread information like this.

Ainsley Earhardt: Well, they took it to court and by law because the delta smelt is an endangered species, the delta smelt had to be protected so the pumps were completely shut off. Farmers were left without any water to their land.

Sean Hannity: Unemployment is now near 40 percent. Please turn this water on now.

Jon Steinman: And if all else fails and Fox viewers are not convinced that Obama is to blame for the drought, Fox News can always pull out some good old fear-mongering.

Ainsley Earhardt: The farmers out are saying that the government is choosing fish over families. Without the water of course the farm land is drying up, there are no crops, no jobs for the farmers, and that affects you in the grocery store. Soon you could be getting your produce from other countries, from South America or from China, and of course that's a safety issue.

Jon Steinman: Now, in spreading this food safety fear of food *imports*, Fox News has conveniently forgotten that California itself is already a hotbed for food safety concerns such as this collage of clips compiled by Deconstructing Dinner here.

Female: We are beginning tonight with a salmonellosis scare and health officials warning consumers not to eat certain brands of Central coast spinach. This all comes after a routine task to detect Salmonella in the spinach.

Male: This morning in Pender Produce in Dickson, California, they were taking pistachios off the shelves; they came from the Setton Pistachio Plant in Central California and may be tainted with Salmonella.

Male: If you are immune compromised, young or old, it could be deadly.

Male: The nuts have been distributed across the country and could be in dozens of product.

Male: Food and Drug Administration has expanded the list of foods it's looking into as possible culprits in a Salmonella outbreak that has sickened nearly 950 Americans. Begin with a recall of locally grown Romaine lettuce.

Female: Dale, the lettuce was sold by Ag Giant Tanimura and Antle, the company has recalled 22,000 cartons of its bulk or wrapped Romaine lettuce.

Male: Consumer alert for you, a parsley recall to tell you about, we're Muranaka Farm Incorporated, a company out of California is recalling its parsley because it may be contaminated by Salmonella. The company is voluntarily recalling 1,005 cases of 60-count fresh bunched parsley after sampling showed Salmonella.

Jon Steinman: And if it's not food safety concerns that Fox News can use to challenge the President they love to hate why not bring on a guest who can make the links between drought, 9/11, and terrorists.

Male: As mayor for eight years, I've worked with Homeland Security after 9/11. One of the things we were charged with by the federal government was to work together locally to protect the water supply to farming communities so they can continue to provide food for the nation. Now, if you were to have told me that water would have stopped, I would have believed maybe Al Qaeda struck but not the federal government.

Jon Steinman: Despite the sheer misinformation and fear mongering being communicated through U.S. media like Fox News and their sister paper the Wall Street Journal, Doug Obegi of the Natural Resources Defense Council remains optimistic that California can attend to the water crisis affecting the State, and by extension affecting the reliance all of North America has on California food. He speaks of the legislation passed the day we interviewed him, that increased protections for California's watershed.

Doug Obegi: The State legislation that we enacted that the legislature passed today was supported by a very unlikely coalition of allies of farmers and urban water agencies, businesses, and some environmental groups like the Natural Resources Defense Council. Despite this broad coalition, despite by-partisan support, we're able to strengthen existing laws in the delta and strengthen environmental laws so that we make sure we're protecting the environment. And I think it shows a broad support for not weakening our environmental laws, but instead redoubling our efforts to be able to sustain species and sustain quality of life. What Californians are most known for are; our healthy economy, our abundant fisheries, our beautiful open spaces while still meeting our water supply needs. And I do strongly believe in that vision and I believe that we're getting on the right track. It will be difficult as we come out of drought and hopefully next year will be a wet year and it'll be difficult given the State budget situation and the recession. But, I have no doubt that California will reinvent itself and come out of this crisis stronger and I hope that we will have abundant salmon fisheries and in a year or two, we'll be able to eat salmon and local broccoli.

JS: Doug Obegi – A Staff Attorney of the Natural Resources Defense Council. Also a thanks to Pete Lucero of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and Zeke Grader of the Institute For Fisheries Resources who both lent their voice to today's broadcast.

Unheard audio of our guests today is archived on-line at deconstructingdinner.ca and posted under the November 12th 2009 episode.

(a remix of soundbites from this episode)

ending theme

JS: And that was this week's edition of Deconstructing Dinner produced and recorded at Nelson British Columbia's Kootenay Co-op Radio. I've been your host, Jon Steinman. I thank my technical assistant, John Ryan.

The theme music for Deconstructing Dinner is courtesy of Nelson-area resident, Adham Shaikh. The music used in that last musical remix was courtesy of Nauseous Youth Future of the Broken Fader Cartel.

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