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**ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS, WATER ADVOCATES, AND FISHERIES
REACT TO SEAN HANNITY SPREADING MISINFORMATION
ON CALIFORNIA WATER CRISIS**

*Burson-Marsteller PR Firm Hosts 'Astroturf' Rally at
Expense of Pacific Ecosystem / Economy*

September 17, 2009, Fresno, CA..... Conservative talk show host Sean Hannity aired live from the San Joaquin Valley tonight to garner national attention for California's water crisis. Instead of illustrating how outrageous water speculation and irresponsible agricultural practices are adding to a natural drought, Hannity fueled partisan politics and blamed President Obama for refusing to lift a series of federal mandates and environmental rulings that order a small amount of water to be used to restore regional fisheries and protect the balance of the entire Northern California coastal ecosystem. State water experts counted a total of 10 incorrect statements in Hannity's broadcast.

In June 2009, The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) ordered 5-7% of water flows into the valley (330,000 acre-feet) to be used to restore creeks and estuaries for chinook salmon, which are being threatened with extinction. In addition to the salmon, the NMFS order will help boost populations of other threatened species - including sole, crab, herring, smelt, steelhead, sturgeon, bass, and killer whales. Regional commercial and sport fisheries have collapsed over the past 2 years, and an [independent economic research firm estimates](#) that recovery of the salmon fishery alone would create \$5.7 billion in new economic activity for the state, and the creation of 94,000 new jobs.

“The water needed to save Pacific fisheries is a drop in the bucket compared to what is being lost with irresponsible irrigation techniques and business practices,” says Mike Hudson, President of the Small Boat Commercial Salmon Fishermen's Association. “Local fisheries have completely collapsed and thousands of our lives have been destroyed, but Hannity ignores our families to promote his politics.”

Hannity made no mention of of [a recent Pacific Institute report](#) showing how simple, and cost-effective irrigation techniques could be adopted by valley farmers to save nearly 6 million acre-feet of water per year (over 18 times the amount re-routed by the NMFS order). Nor did he address the growing practice of water speculation, in which rural land owners purchase subsidized water from the federal government and sell it for profit on

the open market (Sandridge Partners, a Sunnyvale real estate company, [recently sold 14,000 acre-feet of water](#) out of the valley for \$77 million). Finally, Hannity failed to explain why the Westlands Water District from which he broadcast from [is sitting on nearly 275,000 acre-feet of water](#) that it is not distributing.

Despite the drought and water restrictions, valley farms are full of bumper crops this year. Agricultural surpluses of water-intensive crops such as [almonds](#), [tomatoes](#), walnuts, and pecans are expected.

Zeke Grader of the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Association extended an on-air invitation to Sean Hannity to visit the Pacific Northwest and interview the fishermen who have been without a livelihood for 2 years. "Certainly we can do both," replied Hannity.

"It is unfortunate that Mr. Hannity has chosen to be a stooge for large land owners making a water grab so they can sell it to southern California for golf courses in the desert," said Grader.

For complete detail of the misinformation told on Hannity's broadcast, please see the attached list.

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Mike Hudson and Zeke Grader are experienced spokespeople and are available for both live and recorded interviews through the above media contact.

COMPLETE DETAIL OF MISINFORMATION ON HANNITY'S FRESNO BROADCAST

False. Hundreds of laborers appeared in the background, backed up for miles, holding signs and screaming chants in support of Hannity.

True. These are the same workers with the same signs that have been hired by large farm growers for the past couple of rallies. On April 14, 2009, the same organization sponsoring Hannity's visit held a march that the United Farm Workers called a "grower-sponsored march, a grower-organized march, for water for growers....not a farmworkers' march." [The New York Times reported](#) "many of the protesters were paid by their employers to march in lieu of harvesting crops."

F. The unemployment rate in the San Joaquin Valley is over 40% because farmers cannot grow crops due to a lack of water.

T. The [State of California's most recent employment data](#) reports that Fresno County, the county in which Hannity filmed, has only 15% unemployment, compared to a 12.1% state average. Furthermore, farm jobs increased by 5.3% in the months immediate following the NMFS environmental ruling. Even before the global recession, the Western region of the county historically had the highest unemployment rate in the state. In 2000, before the drought and environmental restrictions, [unemployment in the Western region was 32%](#).

F. The federal government has shut off the water pumps.

T. Most water is flowing through the valley. [The San Francisco Chronicle](#) reports that nearly 80% of the water from the ailing delta continues to flow directly into the valley. The local water district [has a surplus](#) of hundreds of thousands of acre-feet of water that it is not distributing.

F. The water restrictions were issued to protect only a 2" smelt.

T. A number of species threatened with extinction in this region are being protected by this regulation, including salmon, sole, crab, herring, steelhead, sturgeon, bass, and killer whales. The collapse of one of these fisheries alone is [costing the state \\$5.7 billion and 94,000 jobs](#).

F. The federal government is choosing fish over people.

T. Protecting regional fisheries creates numerous jobs. Both fish and agriculture can prosper if growers adopted simple, cost-effective irrigation techniques. More responsible farming practices would [save 18 times the amount of water](#) being diverted for salmon.

F. The price of processed tomato goods and almonds are going to skyrocket across the nation.

T. This year is predicted to be [a record-breaking harvest](#) of processing tomatoes due to ideal weather conditions. Tomato production is up 15% from last year, with 11% more acres planted. [Mike Montna](#), president and CEO of the California Tomato Growers Association, said this year's processing-tomato harvest — now at the halfway point — is heading toward a record for the state. [Almonds are in record-shattering surpluses](#) as well, and a decrease in production would actually save the industry.

F. The NMFS ruling will require us to import more food from China.

T. Seafood is already the most imported food product in the United States. [The NMFS estimates](#) that 83% of all seafood consumed in America last year was imported from another country. Driving fisheries out of business will only increase food imports. On the other hand, [75% of California's almonds are exported](#) out of the United States.

F. This decision was made by a handful of environmentalists.

T. Restoring water to fisheries has been ordered for over 15 years, beginning in 1992 with [a Congressional law](#) (Central Valley Improvement Act). A [recent independent review](#) was “flabbergasted” that the law has been ignored. A team of government scientists in the Bush administration ordered for water to be rerouted to save fisheries as well, although that order was shelved by the Secretary of the Interior. An additional report was recently released and approved by the new administration.

F. Local residents are flocking to food banks and waiting all day for food.

T. The [local CBS station reported](#) that only ‘dozens of families’ showed up to the food bank.

F. The area of Fresno County in which Hannity reported is a ‘natural breadbasket’ where agriculture flourishes.

T. Huron, CA receives [an average of only 6.7 inches of rain a year](#), far less than what is needed to sustain agriculture.