

## **Thomas Elias: How green is the 'environmental governor'?**

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JULY in California is Wild King Salmon Month, or so said the 2005 proclamation from Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, who likes to style himself the "environmental governor."

That, in fact, is one of the favorite themes of his re-election run, where he's now airing commercials claiming to be "one of our country's most innovative leaders in protecting our environment."

In his year-ago proclamation, Schwarzenegger said, "It is time to consider the valuable role of the salmon industry in fortifying the health and economic prosperity of California."

Yet, this advocate of salmon restoration chopped money for it from the state budget just last year - a move that came, ironically, during Wild King Salmon Month. Before signing that year's spending plan, Schwarzenegger pared a \$31 million "Natural Resources Stewardship Package" he and legislative leaders had agreed upon down to \$14million.

Part of his blue-penciling included cutting funds for salmon restoration in half, from \$8 million to \$4 million, and completely eliminating \$3million earmarked for state fish hatcheries. It's uncertain whether the emergency federal salmon measures Schwarzenegger pushed for this year would even have had to be on the table without those cuts.

Many leading conservationists complain his line-item vetoes were typical of how Schwarzenegger has treated environmental programs. It's something he's tried very hard to gloss over in this election year, with Democratic rival Phil Angelides helping out by being totally ineffective so far at pointing out Arnold's inconsistencies.

"The governor often touts the economic and public health benefits of clean air, water, land and fish and wildlife populations, yet \ actions speak louder than words," said a statement from the Natural Resources Defense Council, a leading conservationist group.

One unilateral Schwarzenegger cut that especially galled environmentalists came when he lopped \$950,000 and eight positions from the state Coastal Commission's energy program staff last year. It's a move he wouldn't dare make this year, but few in this land of short memories remember it now and almost no one noticed it at the time. Commission officers say the cut is one reason the agency has lately played little role in reviewing liquefied natural gas (LNG) applications and federal offshore oil lease actions.

Complained Susan Jordan of the Santa Barbara-based California Coastal Protection Network in an e-mail at the time, "Note the governor's specific mention of LNG in his veto message. This seems to me a play out of the Pete Wilson playbook: Starve the agency; avoid blame for the policy decision."

The cuts left the Coastal Commission with just three persons to evaluate all energy projects along California's 1,100-plus mile shore. That includes 36 federal oil leases, the various LNG proposals, as many as 20 proposed desalination plants and all coastal power plant upgrades and remodels.

Schwarzenegger contended in his message that "the Coastal Commission has sufficient resources to perform critical, high priority work such as the review of LNG applications &" He may be the only one who believes that.

Or, he may have been looking for yet another way to grease approval and construction of LNG receiving facilities along the coast.

Schwarzenegger also cut \$6million last year for state park staffing he'd previously agreed on with leading lawmakers and \$3 million for deferred maintenance at state parks. That's why parks that were already closed or operating on limited hours have stayed that way. And don't expect trails now obstructed by fallen trees and other debris from last winter's heavy storms to be cleared soon. The governor also wiped out a \$5 million 2005 allocation to hire new Fish and Game wardens and \$1million for a trout restoration program.

So it may have been no coincidence that Schwarzenegger's celebratory statement upon signing the 2005 budget mentioned the fact it included no new taxes and an education funding increase, plus a program to increase the number of registered nurses emerging from community colleges. Transportation funding was mentioned, as was a payback of money the state had forcibly borrowed from cities and counties.

But nary a word about the environment. It's different this year, as Schwarzenegger consistently maintains he's a friend of the environment.

It's true he broke with President Bush over global warming when he expressed support of the Kyoto Protocol to cut greenhouse gases. He appealed to the federal Environmental Protection Agency for a waiver of any requirement to use ethanol in gasoline, which increases automotive emissions of oxides of nitrogen.

Some analysts believe Schwarzenegger is more comfortable pushing high-minded long-term goals like the "hydrogen highway" than nitty-gritty programs that gradually work toward those goals.

The upshot is that if Schwarzenegger wants to be known and remembered as an environmental protector, he could start by protecting environmental programs - and he frequently has done the opposite.

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