

Pre-History of Friends of the River

1969: Sierra Club River Conservation Committee formed, Scott Fleming, Chairman. New Melones Dam becomes priority issue as new member Gerry Meral sounds alarm at possible loss of Stanislaus River.

1969 Autumn: David Kay addresses Governor's Conference on California's Changing Environment. Subject: "People and Water: The Stanislaus Question."

1970 Spring: David Kay conducts nationwide review of wild river recreation by raft, kayak, and canoe. One of the first documentations on benefits of river use and protection.

1970 Spring: Gerry Meral begins to amass one of world's largest private files on the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers relative to cost-benefit analysis and construction plans for New Melones Dam.

1970 Autumn: Gerry Meral and David Kay agree to collaborate on Stanislaus protection effort.

1971 Spring: Meral completes "New Melones Dam: A Critical Overview," a brilliantly far-sighted and scientifically sound critique of the cost-benefits of New Melones Dam and its adverse environmental impacts. An alternative smaller dam is proposed. Treatise set basis for future attacks on the large dam, incorporating unique economic, social, and ecological factors now generally employed by dam fighters.

1971 Spring: Kay completes "Economic Values of Stanislaus River to Calaveras and Tuolumne Counties." First effort to equate financial benefits of river recreation to local economies.

1971 Spring: Meral and Kay carpet-bag Calaveras and Tuolumne Counties in effort to build local grassroots support for protecting Stanislaus. Boards of Supervisors are addressed on adverse impacts of New Melones Dam (no success).

1971 Summer: Kay and Meral spearhead petition for state review of New Melones Dam by California Resources Secretary Norman Livermore. With help from the Sierra Club, river outfitters, and river guides over 7,000 signatures are gathered endorsing review.

1971 Autumn: Stanislaus petitions are submitted to Secretary Livermore, who tells Meral and Kay he's unimpressed at first press conference on river protection effort.

1971-72 Winter: Meral becomes Staff Scientist for Environmental Defense Fund in Berkeley, joining attorneys Tom Graff and Michael Palmer. Sierra Club River Conservation Committee begins first Stanislaus cards and letters campaign to Gov. Ronald Reagan and Senators Tunney and Cranston. Negative response, although Tunney expresses

interest in mitigating loss of Stanislaus River.

1972 Spring: Kay joins EDF as Public Information Officer. EDF begins legal and media campaign to halt New Melones Dam.

1972 Summer: Meral and Kay coordinate major petition campaign to President Nixon to demonstrate local support for saving Stanislaus. Crowd situations utilized for producing over 200,000 signatures. Presidential aid John Ehrlichman stonewalls request to submit petitions. Council for Environmental Quality notified instead.

1972-73: EDF files suit contesting validity of EIS for New Melones Dam. Suit lasted over two years and ultimately lost in the U. S. Supreme Court. During this time, Stanislaus dam controversy receives statewide media attention and river becomes major conservation issue. Suit delays dam construction by several years, allowing time for broad grassroots support to develop. River guides unite and focus tremendous energy on efforts to save Stanislaus.

1973 Spring: EDF testimony, particularly Gerry Meral's, before California Water Resources Control Board results in Decision 1422 regulating size of New Melones Reservoir on grounds most of the water isn't needed for another 20-50 years. The Bureau of Reclamation says it will fill the reservoir to capacity anyway, refusing to recognize the state's right to control its own water. California Attorney General vows to sue the Federal Government on this issue.

1973 Summer/Autumn: Meral and Kay conceive state initiative to place Stanislaus protection on the ballot. Initial meetings with Rob Coughlin, David Oak, Dennis Vierra. Friends of the River is formulated.

Notes: If there seems to be a heavy emphasis on Meral and Kay in the early stages of the Stanislaus effort, it is because they were pretty much alone at this time. They would soon be joined by the energetic river people, by Mark Dubois (grassroots organizer) and Tom Graff (attorney), and by a river-loving public.