

# *Interview with Secretary of the Interior Donald Hodel*

*Editor's Note: While writing their articles on Hetch Hetchy and the Raker Act, published in the previous edition of ENVIRONS, authors Boyd Sprehn and Marc Picker sought an official comment from Secretary of the Interior Donald Hodel. They were unable to contact Secretary Hodel. Shortly after that edition was published, Secretary Hodel visited northern California. Although unavailable for an in-person interview, Secretary Hodel agreed to answer submitted written questions.*

*Below are the questions to Secretary Hodel from ENVIRONS, and his answers as received on May 2, 1988:*

**1) The Solicitor General's Office is studying the newest San Francisco-Pacific Gas & Electric wheeling contracts. Has the Solicitor General given you any preliminary indication whether those contracts are in compliance with the Raker Act?**

The Interior Solicitor's office is presently reviewing all legal related aspects of my Hetch Hetchy proposal. It would be unwise for me to comment until that review is completed.

**2) Have you personally given San Francisco's compliance with the Raker Act any consideration, and what are your conclusions?**

No, I have not, and until the Solicitor's office completes its review I am not going to comment.

**3) If it is found that San Francisco is and has been violating the Raker Act, would you have any compunctions against initiating legal action to have the contracts reformed, voided or to take away San Francisco's rights to O'Shaughnessy Dam and the Hetch Hetchy system?**

It would also be unwise for me to speculate on this question.

**4) Replacement of water and power resources for San Francisco have been the main focus of the Department of the Interior's public comments and studies so far. If San Francisco is determined to be in violation of the Raker Act, will water and power replacement still be a priority concern for the federal government?**

Regardless of any legal questions, the City of San Francisco and the other Bay area communities that have been using Hetch Hetchy water and power still need to be assured a continuing water and power supply to meet their needs in the 21st Century.

Therefore, any plan to eliminate the portion of the Hetch Hetchy system inside Yosemite National Park would need to provide water and power for the Bay area, at least in the amounts that would have been contributed by Hetch Hetchy.

**5) Where did you get the idea to drain Hetch Hetchy Reservoir? How long had you been considering the idea before your August 1987 announcement?**

The idea came to me after I had signed off on a similar proposal to eliminate three dams in Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado. These dams were owned by the City of Longmont, Colorado. They had deteriorated and were in need of major repairs. Rather than commit funds for repair, the city agreed to sell the dams to the National Park Service, which is now in the process of restoring those reservoir sites to a more natural condition. It occurred to me that while the parallels are not exact, the principal is the same and that this approach might assist us in our efforts to maintain superlative outdoor recreational opportunities at heavily used Yosemite.

**6) Why did you announce your idea in August 1987?**

I announced it then because I had contacted the Governor's office, then Mayor Feinstein, and certain members of Congress and told them we were planning to look at the feasibility of this idea.

**7) Did your announcement have an relation at all to the then-pending negotiations between San Francisco and PG&E on the recently signed long-term contracts?**

No, it did not. I was not aware of those negotiations.

**8) What is the status of the \$600,000 budget request you submitted for continued study of the Hetch Hetchy idea?**

It has been considered in the committee hearings as part of President Reagan's budget, but, at this writing, no action has been taken.

**9) Who do you count as opponents to the request both within and outside of the Congress, and why do they oppose the request?**

People oppose this idea for several reasons, most of them obvious. Some would be inconvenienced to various degrees in switching to other water and power sources. Others have less philosophical aversion to dams in national parks. I suppose there might even be a few who oppose this



idea because I suggested it. Overall, perhaps those who are opposed to even looking at the feasibility of such an idea are afraid that a feasibility study will show it can be done.

**10) Who do you count as supporters of the request both within and outside the Congress, and why do they support the budget request?**

Those who support this idea range from those who have always been upset by the presence of the dam in Yosemite to those who see this as a challenge of our stewardship of our great God-given treasures of natural beauty.

**11) What do you think will happen to the budget request and the actual idea of restoring Hetch Hetchy valley in January if a Republican administration is elected to succeed President Reagan? What if a Democratic administration is elected?**

I would hope that which ever party occupies the White House in 1989 that this idea would be considered on its merits and not become a political issue. I am optimistic that it will get a fair hearing in any eventuality.

**12) If the \$600,000 budget request fails to get through Congress this year, what will be your next move as Secretary of the Interior?**

I'll cross that bridge when I come to it.

**13) Will you continue to work for and support this idea in January, after your term of office has expired?**

Absolutely, with vigor and enthusiasm. Even

under the best of circumstances, this idea will probably occupy several more Secretaries of the Interior before it is resolved.

**14) If your Solicitor General concludes that San Francisco has violated the Raker Act, do you need Congressional approval to pursue action?**

Again, until the Solicitor's office at Interior completes its review of all legal related aspects of my proposal, I am going to refrain from commenting.

**15) If your idea proves to be feasible, to what extent would you contemplate removing San Francisco's power and water system -- breach/removal of O'Shaughnessy Dam only or removal of any part of the system which lies within Yosemite National Park?**

A decision of feasibility for this idea would carry with it some preliminary decisions but it would be premature to speculate on the details now. Obviously, getting water out of the reservoir is part of the basic idea but beyond that I wouldn't want to limit the range of alternatives now.

**16) Do think it is actually feasible to physically drain the reservoir and restore the valley?**

Everything I have seen so far indicates that this would not be a major problem. The major consideration would be how much do you want to speed up the natural process with activities such as reseeded and replanting.

**17) Has the January 19, 1988, Draft Report on Restoration Options for Hetch Hetchy Valley prepared by the National Park Service influenced your opinion on the feasibility or viability of your idea to restore the valley?**

That report has encouraged me to continue my quest. All the factors aren't in yet, but I'm encouraged by the fact that what we are discovering now is positive as to the feasibility of this idea.

**18) The January 19, 1988, Draft Report finds the idea eminently feasible, but attaches no cost estimates to any proposal. Have any preliminary cost estimates been made as to breach of the dam and restoration of the valley? If yes, what are those estimates?**

There are any number of off-the-wall estimates, mostly from those opposed to this idea, but I am not aware of any estimates that are the product of thorough research. That process is still underway.

**19) What is your reaction to the Department of Energy's report on the Hetch Hetchy idea?**

Obviously, I don't agree with that report.

**20) Why do you think that Secretary Herrington got involved in this issue?**

You will have to ask him that question.