

Stanislaus River 'sloganeering' dam confusing

By Alan Cline

To the amazement of its conservationist sponsors, opponents of Proposition 17 are adopting a "Stop Pollution" slogan in seeking "No" votes against the initiative to halt construction of a big dam on the Stanislaus River.

Californians will be hearing much more of this budding controversy in the weeks to come.

Some 10 billboards pushing that theme are already in place, and an extensive poster campaign is planned.

"The wording is almost comical," says Robert Caughlin, spokesman for supporters who placed the measure on the ballot by obtaining 500,000 signatures. "Our attorney says there is nothing we can do about it, but it is still sleazy. It obfuscates the issues."

Michael McManus, a top hand in the opposition camp, replies that the dam will revive a dying river and halt degradation in a variety of ways.

The initiative adds two stretches of the stream to the State Wild and Scenic Rivers system and in effect calls for the federal government to halt construction on the New Melones Dam. A total of \$70 million has already been spent on the \$300 million structure.

Along with confusion over the word, "pollution," a split within the conservation movement is noticeable. The initiative originated with Friends of the River and has strong support from

the Sierra Club, Friends of the Earth, Committee for 2 Million, and the Environmental Defense Fund.

"No" vote supporters include the California Wildlife Federation, which voted its opposition last weekend, the California Waterfowl Association, California Outdoor Recreation League, and smaller area groups.

The "No" advocates contend the dam will increase river flow in critical periods, thus alleviating pollution, particularly in the bottom 55-mile section.

But advocates of 17 say the pollution is caused by improper irrigation practices and inadequate sewage treatment. "Part of the reason it is dying," says Caughlin, "is because they are killing it."

A nine-mile white-water stretch upstream used extensively by rafters and kayak enthusiasts also would be protected.

McManus alleges commercial firms using that piece of water initiated the Save the Stanislaus activity in their own interest.

Initiative backers call the dam a boondoggle. The proposition would permit a smaller dam which Caughlin claims experts say would provide 70 per cent of the benefits of the big dam. Opponents dispute that conclusion.

Much will be heard later about strategy in this last initiative campaign before the tough restraints of Proposition 9 campaign reform take over next January.