TID TIDINGS

Newsletter of the Tulare Irrigation District

The Board of Directors holds regular public meetings on the 2nd Tuesday of each month at 9:00 am at the District office in Tulare.

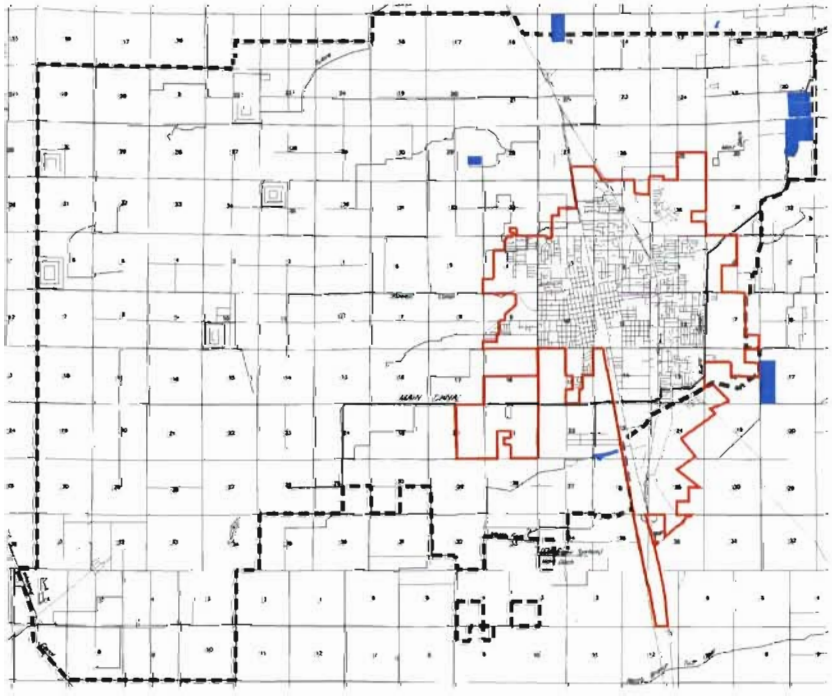
In This Issue:

NEW CITY WATER PARTNERSHIP

Working off the momentum of the recent purchase with the City of Tulare of 155 acres east of town for a future groundwater recharge and regulation basin, TID has just signed another agreement with the City for water purchases. The agreement spells out a program under which the City will financially assist TID in buying water, mostly in wetter years, to deliver to recharge basins that ring the City and provide underground benefits to both City dwellers and TID farmers. By an agreement mechanism which comes up with a computed water purchase amount that puts the City on par with TID's water users in terms of surface water usage relative to groundwater dependence, the City will buy the water at TID's Friant Class 2 water cost each year. It is expected that the water will be largely imported from the Friant-Kern Canal. The City – via its own well field – currently gets all its water from the underground and, with this precedent-setting agreement in place, can proclaim that it is bearing its rightful share of the regional burden in our attempt to eliminate groundwater overdraft and bring the underground basin into long-term balance.

Recharge operations under this agreement will benefit TID too, as our farmers draw from the same underground source as does the City. Accelerated water replenishment in basins near the City limits and within TID will be good for our farmers, particularly in drier years when they have to rely more heavily on their wells for irrigation water.

Not all regions of the state can boast of strong working relationships between the "competing" uses of water such as urban and agriculture. We are grateful that our urban neighbor and its governing City Council is setting an example for other agricultural regions that are slowly urbanizing to look at ways to partner with farm water suppliers and, more importantly, is willing to step up to the plate to secure our collective water and economic future.



TID Water Basins for City Recharge Shown in Blue

WESTSIDE WATER WOES

Already-planted crops such as these are being abandoned due to lack of water and won't make it to harvest

Due in part to depleted river flows and reservoir storage in Northern California, the west side – like last summer – faces a very difficult summer for irrigation deliveries. Recent judicial actions requiring the large Delta water export projects to cut pumping are causing a sense of dismay for farmers depending on this water for their crops. Much of this west-side area has no groundwater to draw from as a backup supply when canal supplies shrink. The decisions of Judge Wanger in Federal court are handed down to water project operators in an attempt to help the resident Delta smelt and migratory Chinook salmon. These fisheries are classified as endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA).

While last year was drier in terms of rain and snow, reduced reservoir hold-over supplies coming into this year coupled with such drastic fish protection actions are presenting unprecedented challenges for west-side farmers. Many Bay-area and So. California cities are feeling the pinch too, a not so welcome reminder on just how dependant these areas are on getting water from the Delta.

Evidencing the seriousness of the situation, Gov. Schwarzenegger recently declared a drought emergency in nine Central Valley counties, including Sacramento, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare, and Kern. He directed the Department of Water Resources to expedite water transfers and to facilitate groundwater pump-ins to the California Aqueduct that skirts along the Valley's west side to move extra water to needy areas.

The east side of our County fares reasonably well relative to the rest of the south valley. The several Sierra reservoirs – including those behind Friant and Terminus dams from which TID gets its water – are able to release stored water without the onerous ESA restrictions faced in Northern California water systems. Things are much tougher on the western side of Tulare, Kings and Fresno counties, where the lack of usable groundwater and severely-reduced surface water supply sources imported from the Delta are wreaking havoc among growers. In the vast Westlands Water District in Kings and Fresno counties, 200,000 acres are being fallowed due to the recent judicial fishery decisions, and the economic impact of crop losses is being projected with help from experts at the University of California. It is hoped that such monetary information, not just for farmers but for the many west-side communities that depend on farm-related activities, will help impress upon politicians the need to expand the state's water systems.

In his drought emergency declaration, the Governor underscored the importance of fixing the state's broken water system and renewed his call for a comprehensive water bond package to address this unacceptable situation in the long-term. While TID may not be in such dire straits today as the west side, we are mindful of our continued groundwater overdraft and soon-to-be water supply losses to the San Joaquin River and come to the sobering reminder that perhaps we are not too far behind.

2008 Budget and Bond Issue

At its May meeting the Board approved, as it typically does, a revised budget for 2008. The preliminary budget approved the prior December is routinely updated to reflect the now-known conditions for water supplies and sales. The budget shows income coming in at around $6.2 million and expenses, including land and equipment, at about $6.6 million, resulting in a cash shortfall of about $0.4 million, exclusive of capital expenditures. This is typical of years that are somewhat below normal in water supplies. We draw from the Water Rate Stabilization Reserve Fund to hold water rates relatively stable in such years, resulting in the cash drawdown by year's end. We may be able to offset this shortfall and reserves drawdown with further efforts to exchange and transfer water and their associated fees.

We've been able to stay at our current summer rate of $33 per acre-foot now for several years by using this fund and replenishing it in wetter years with sizable water sales and water transfer and exchange revenue.

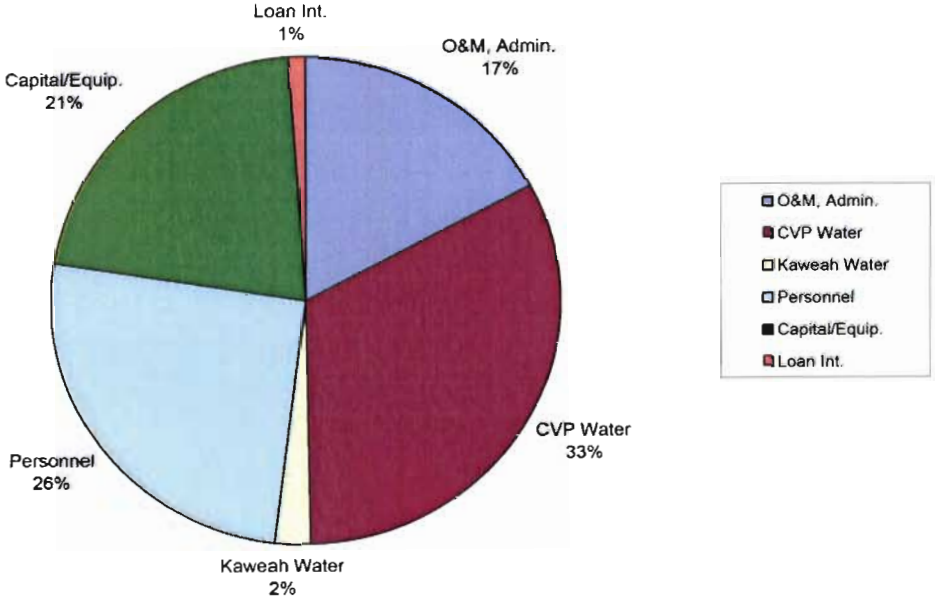
Shown in the pie chart below is a breakdown of our projected expenses. As shown in the chart, a significant part of each year's budget will continue to be the cost to pay for our CVP water contract supply, an extremely necessary investment in order to keep our area's groundwater table from plummeting to uneconomical pumping depths.

Infused in this year's financial activities is the recent Board decision to issue bonds in the amount of $4 million to cover our TID headquarters relocation project (office and shop facilities moving to the corner of Rd 68 and Ave 240 west of town) and to provide funds for future recharge basin construction projects. TID earned a Standard & Poors credit rating of A+ leading up to this bond issue, a grade usually reserved for the larger, well-heeled urban water districts in the Bay area and So. California. We intend to take advantage of this rating in the future if and when we, like other Friant districts, decide to pay off our original construction debt for the CVP and convert to perpetual water contracts as is called for in the San Joaquin River Settlement.

Employee News

A warm welcome to Andy Linhares. He is "getting his feet wet" as one of our new Ditch Tender/Ditch Maintenance crew. Andy brings with him an extensive background in fabrication and managing resources. He is a native Tularean, a graduate of Tulare Union High, and was a supervisor at the Tulare Grumman Olson/ Kidron Truck plant until it closed earlier this year. He has three girls that have kept him busy with Girl Scouts and other youth activities. He is blessed with two grandchildren who also keep him busy. His favorite hobby is restoring Studebakers, including the truck you will see parked at TID during the off-water season. He has always been known for his quick smile and engaging conversation. Welcome again Andy!

2008 Expenditure Budget



San Joaquin Settlement in Holding Pattern

The Settlement Agreement to restore the salmon fishery on the San Joaquin River below Friant Dam remains on hold in Congress. Since last reported on in the last issue of TID Tidings, the bill achieved a majority vote in the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, moving it to a future Senate floor vote. A companion bill likewise awaits a floor vote in the House.

The final form of the bill before Congress – an improvement over the original Agreement – contains the following new USBR commitments to:

- Expand the Friant-Kern and Madera canals, enabling districts like TID to import more San Joaquin water in wetter years
- Build interconnection facilities in Kern County, the final linkage on any future recapture plan for water sent down the San Joaquin for the fish
- Contribute federal dollars on a fifty-fifty basis for local projects to improve water management, groundwater recharge and banking.

These new programs are on top of the original provisions in the settlement obligating the USBR to implement a plan to recapture or recirculate water released down the river back to Friant users and to make available water at $10 per acre-foot as payback for water contract reductions when needed for fishery releases.

While the details are uncertain at this time, it is anticipated that this bill is now to be packaged with numerous other pieces of legislation into one combined bill that will be voted on in the Senate, and then the House, and then on to the President's desk if it passes out of Congress. Politics at a much grander scale than just the San Joaquin Valley water supply will now come into play, dealing with the particulars and popularity of each piece of the combined bill and the tug and pull of partisan politics. Just when this bill will be aired on the floor of each respective house is also not known – it might happen prior to the end of this 110th congressional session in October or get pushed into a lame-duck session after Thanksgiving. There is the chance that neither will happen, thus the bill would be then back to the drawing boards somewhat as it slides into 2009 where the newly voted-in Congress and President will consider it. All Friant can do now is wait and see how this plays out. No doubt NRDC - the plaintiffs in the original lawsuit - is waiting too and judging whether Congress, representing the will of the people, will finally act on this landmark Settlement legislation. If they don't, then we're all left wondering what the next course of action may be.

GROUNDWATER REPORT

Continuing from last year's decline, the area's groundwater levels taken in early spring dropped another 18 ft from where they were last spring (This can be seen on the chart on page 5). Not surprising, since last year was well below average in ditch water supply and farmers had to use their wells more to make up the shortfall.

More troubling, however, is the 6-month trend in level changes from the fall to spring the next year. Usually the early fall measurements represent an aquifer that's been drawn down from that summer's pumping, followed by the recovery period in late fall and early winter during which levels rise and return to "static conditions." Static conditions are what engineers use to gauge the true depth-to-water status of a groundwater basin, a measurement not masked by the level depressions caused by heavy pumping in certain areas.

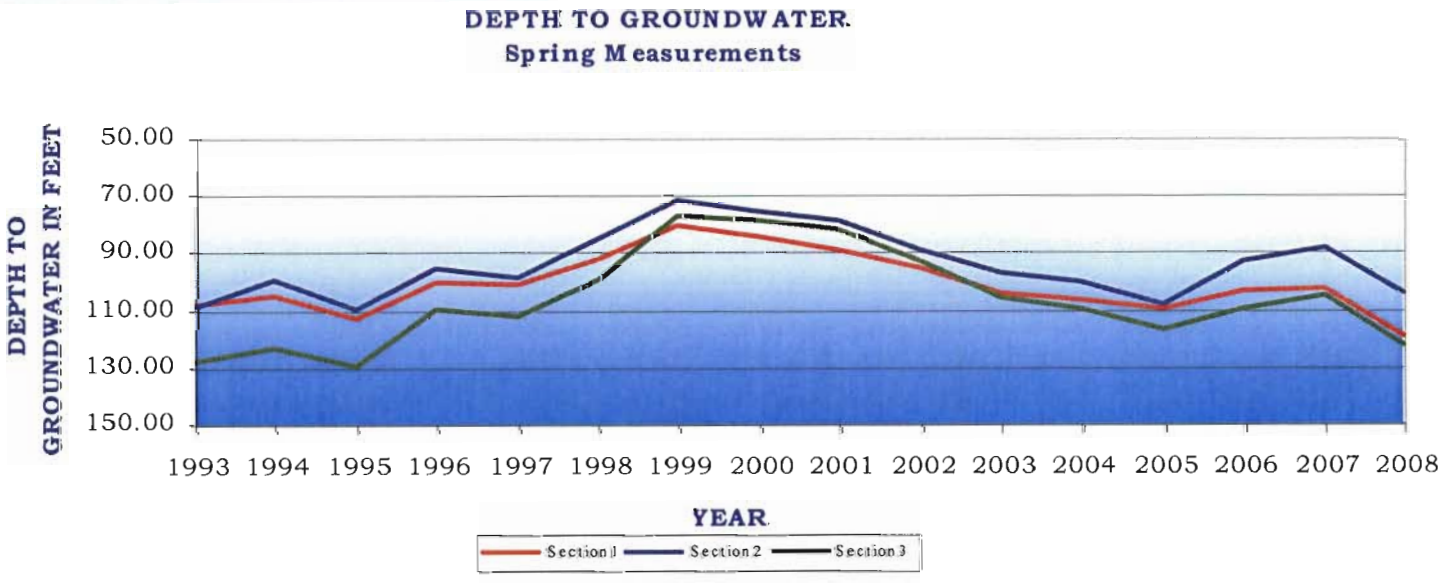
This spring we didn't see nearly as much of a rebound as we usually do from the previous fall. In fact, the spring levels were only about 1ft higher than the fall of 2007. The first two months of last winter were above average, which should have helped to recover groundwater levels, but evidently last summer's pumping was heavy enough to win over any significant recovery to static conditions. Moreover, with the expanding year-round pumping of the cities of Visalia and Tulare, the ability of the aquifer to return to static levels may be becoming somewhat overshadowed by the continuous extractions of these urban areas.

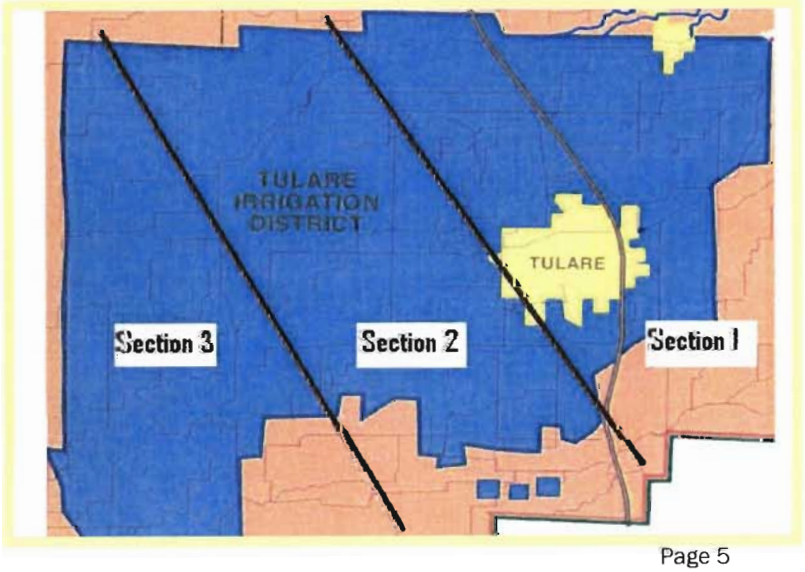
Such a trend only serves to underscore the need to take full advantage of the wet years with lots of local and imported surface water. TID, and other water management entities in the basin, need to deliver all we can of these wet-year supplies to farmers so they refrain from pumping or to recharge basins and sandy channel systems to directly replenish the underground.

Dwindling Snow Pack and Short Irrigation Run

As of the end of February, things were looking pretty good water supply-wise. The Sierra snow pack was coming in around average with the hope that it would climb even higher and we at TID were looking forward to a rebound year when compared to the last one in 2007. One thing happened to dampen our plan – it didn't rain anymore! No exaggeration, the months of March through May taken together were among the driest ever recorded. The ample snow pack stayed up in the mountains for a long time with temperatures this spring well below normal, or so we thought. It turns out that winds and clear skies may have caused significant "sublimation" of the snow, i.e., it essentially evaporated into thin air. To make matters worse, a lot of the snow that did stay on the ground soaked in, a pattern often occurring when the current year is preceded by a very dry one. This results in conditions where the mountain and foothill parched soil sub-strata act much like a dry sponge, retaining water from melting snow that would otherwise feed creeks and river tributaries, ultimately directing the water into reservoir storage. In the end, this all turned a 115% snow pack year into a 73% runoff year – an unusual situation indeed and one that sent confusing signals to many a water manager and operator up and down the Valley.

What did this mean for TID's summer irrigation run? Well, what might have looked like a normal run lasting about 2 ½ to 3 months has now shrunk to about 1 ½ months or slightly more. We began on June 9th and are hoping to make the run last until nearly the end of July. Depending on temperatures and number of daily water orders, we'll do the best we can with our water supply to serve the needs of our farmers.





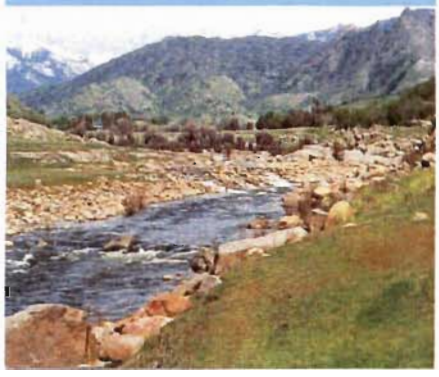
TULARE IRRIGATION DISTRICT

SECTION LOCATIONS

Tulare Irrigation District
1350 W. San Joaquin Ave.
Tulare, California 93274

LOOK INSIDE...

Visit Us At...www.tulareid.org



Founded in 1889, Tulare ID was one of the first irrigation districts in California. Its purpose is to serve the water supply needs of the greater Tulare area, a rich and agriculturally diverse region within the Southern San Joaquin Valley. The water provided comes locally from the Kaweah River and is also imported from the Federal Central Valley Project.

Important Dates to Remember

July	4th—District Holiday
August	1st, 8th & 15th—Delinquent Assessment List Publication 29th—Tax Sale Certificates Record
September	9th Board of Equalization Opens 19th Board of Equalization Closes

The TID Tidings is published quarterly by the Tulare Irrigation District. Questions about the articles or items appearing in the TID Tidings can be answered by reaching the Tulare ID office at (559) 686-3425