

TID TIDINGS

Newsletter of the Tulare Irrigation District



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

WATER FOR THE SAN JOAQUIN RIVER

TID, along with the many other east-side districts with contracts for water from Friant Dam, has just had a cloud lifted from over its head, one that had been there for 18 years. We'll see some blue sky ahead for awhile; however we don't expect perfect weather forever. Only time will tell.

An environmental coalition led by the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) had sued the USBR (owner of Friant Dam) for not releasing enough water down the San Joaquin River below the dam to sustain a salmon fishery. After many years of incremental rulings by the judge and attempts to negotiate a compromise that had previously failed, that case has now been settled out of court. The Friant districts are cautiously optimistic that this settlement is the best decision given the circumstances and uncertain future in a continued court battle.

At the heart of the settlement agreement is an eight-year plan to restore portions of the lower San Joaquin River and render

the channel suitable to contain the fishery flows and provide habitat for salmon spawning. By the year 2014, all such river channel work is to be completed at an estimated cost of anywhere from \$0.5 billion to \$1 billion. The federal and state governments are to pay for all the costs; however, a significant portion of the federal cost comes from fees already being paid by Friant districts..

Upon the completion of river restoration, the Friant districts must collectively devote upwards of 200,000 AF per year, *on average*, for release down the river from the dam. This water will be deducted from annual water allocations otherwise available for delivery to the districts via the Friant-Kern and Madera canals. This water is to be released down the river in such a way to coincide with salmon fishery passage, migration, and spawning needs.

Between the massive river and habitat

See RIVER on pg. 2

In This Issue:

Water for the San Joaquin River	Cover
Planning Begins	3
2006 Water Supply—2 nd Banner Year	3
Important Dates to Remember	4



Water in the San Joaquin—May be a more common sight in the future

restoration plans and the significant water flows to be introduced into the river channel, this San Joaquin River program is being looked at as one of the biggest environmental restoration plans ever conceived in the nation. All in all, about 150 miles of river channel are to be impacted and the water committed to the plan is enough to irrigate about 70,000 acres or supply a community of nearly 700,000 people annually.

You might ask yourselves, as farmers depending upon adequate supplies of canal water, why did the Friant group feel compelled to settle this out of court? Have they given away the store, so to speak? After all, we've been paying for, and receiving, this water from the river for over 50 years now and in some ways it seems preposterous that it could now be taken away.

Here are the opinions and conclusions, arrived at unanimously, among all of the Friant district boards, managers and attorneys involved in this case:

- NRDC hung its hat on a state Fish & Game Code requirement – stating that sufficient flows must be released from a dam to maintain downstream fish in good condition – which had to be reckoned with yet again. It had been dealt with before in the 1950's and the rulings at that time were in favor of USBR and its contractors receiving the water. Even in the 1950's, the favorable decisions came after a hard fight with the Dept. of Fish & Game. The NRDC challenge reared the head of this issue again, this time in the midst of an influential environmental movement that was virtually nonexistent in the 1950's.
- Friant concluded that the presiding federal judge in this case was predetermined to steer the outcome towards a stipulation to release water into the river. Most of his decisions over many years, and certainly all of the significant ones, pointed in this direction and were clearly in favor of NRDC. Collectively, our attorneys began to urge the decision-makers to consider a settlement.
- By far, our biggest concern was the fear that the judge – or any settlement acceptable to NRDC – would require so much water as to essentially gut the operation of the Friant system. A major breakthrough occurred about a year ago when NRDC's own biologists began saying that salmon would return with additional flows on the order of 200,000 AF or so, up to one-fourth the amount we had presumed in the past.
- With strong signals from Senator Feinstein and Congressman Radanovich that the fight had gone on long enough, an atmosphere was then created to attempt to settle the case in a fashion we could live with. The District's own legal counsel, Dan Dooley of Visalia, was one of two principal Friant negotiators in developing the settlement agreement.

What will all this mean for TID? One thing is for sure. We know that we will lose some water – to put a number to it, about 20% on average of our imported Friant supply (or about 10% of our *total* supply which includes our Kaweah River source). This amounts to some 14,000 AF, and we would see a bigger reduction in some years and less in others. Many of the wetter years will see the biggest reductions. Absent any efforts to offset this reduction, it's fair to say that TID farmers will pump an additional 14,000 AF or so from the underground, accelerating the rate of decline in depth to groundwater over time.

The loss of imported water and expected lowering of groundwater levels within and around TID are obviously significant detrimental impacts to our area. While these impacts are at least eight years off, we are beginning to assess our future course of action to alleviate them. We assume that it's probably not going to be possible, either financially or from a water availability standpoint, to simply buy enough water from willing sellers each and every year to offset the expected losses. Knowing our farmers will likely depend more on groundwater, we plan to emphasize those programs and projects that will increase TID's ability to recharge the underground supply in the wettest of years with what used to be considered surplus supplies. There also may be certain dry years where the



Friant Dam and Friant-Kern Canal

ability to purchase additional water may be essential to maintain a summer irrigation run.

These types of programs all require funding to implement, and TID is looking at all means possible to raise such funds while minimizing the need to increase water sale and assessment rates. We are not alone in this predicament – all of the Friant contractors are in the same boat, trying to determine how to cope with the anticipated water losses. Each one has different problems – some have no other water supply sources and thus place more emphasis on securing more water, others may look to serve as exchange or banking partners to meet such water shortage needs. We

are considering various partnerships with these districts to the extent they may help our situation. Because of its sheer size alone, the state and federal governments are taking a keen interest in the river restoration features of this settlement and funding from such sources to further the effort may also be a possibility.

It is not lost on urban community leaders within the valley's east side that their underground water supply will also be impacted. These and other urban centers face not only the loss of an imported water supply and its indirect impact on groundwater, but also the growing urban demand for more wells and increased groundwater pumping. Given this two-fold problem, TID hopes to enlist the assistance of Tulare and Visalia in implementing programs to foster additional groundwater recharge within the Kaweah basin.

The crux of TID's planning efforts related to life "post-settlement" lies in the awareness that the underground water supply will bear the brunt of the impacts and that this limited resource must be protected and preserved. To that end, we ultimately plan to implement a variety of programs designed to increase the recharge of surplus water supplies in the wettest of years and to provide the financial resources to buy water when available to fuel such underground water supplementation. We also hope to set aside sufficient financial resources to be able to buy additional water in some of the very dry years sufficient to sustain a much-needed summer irrigation run when necessary.

PLANNING BEGINS

Using a \$300,000 federal grant award issued last fall, TID staff have begun to refine the many features that will compose its "Modernization Project" to improve water management within the District's canal system. The Project proposal laid out a very general plan to rebuild a number of check structures in our canal system with the goal of providing better water level control, thereby improving delivery flows at the many turnouts serving farmers. Also, the Project calls for the installation of new telemetry stations at key sites, such as regulating basins, the information from which our Water Dept. will have a better handle on what's happening out in the system at any given time.

We've been exploring conceptual plans for these improvements under the guidance of the Cal Poly Irrigation and Training Research Center (ITRC) located in San Luis Obispo. We're now at the point of selecting exact locations and design features for each Project site so that our construction crew can begin its work. So don't be surprised if you spot work being done at District facilities here and there throughout the District over the next year or so. Our only anticipated slow downs will be having to work around the water delivery season and so far we've had a long one, not that anyone is complaining!

In round numbers, we plan on rebuilding about 10 check structures and adding about 12 telemetry stations under this project. There are a total of about 400 such structures in the District and many candidate sites where a telemetry station would be a help to our water operations. That's why we intend to evaluate closely the benefits, costs, and potential problems that will emerge as this project comes to fruition. If these first project sites provide cost-effective improvements in our operations, then we would continue to seek funding to plan for further project phases at other locations. Our goal throughout this effort will continue to be to improve service to farmers, to conserve water, and in the end enable the District to provide affordable and reliable irrigation water to its many landowners and water users.

2006 WATER SUPPLY— 2ND BANNER YEAR

On the heels of a six-year dry cycle, 2005 provided welcome relief and a much-needed rebound in groundwater replenishment. Adding to the rebound was the occurrence of yet another wet year in 2006. Things were looking decent with near average snowfall and precipitation going into February. Then, with a dry February, water officials were getting worried that a return to drier conditions was occurring after a brief reprieve in 2005. However, March proved to be one of the wettest on record and quickly put us back into the wet-year category. Wet conditions extended into April, with some areas of the state reporting over 60 days of rain. We had nearly 45 days, an unusual occurrence for this area indeed.

As can often happen in wet years, ample water supplies became coupled with concerns of flooding driven by either heavy spring rains or early snowmelt. Some of this did occur, but with the careful planning of reservoir operations and utilization of all available river channels and recharge basins, damage was kept to a minimum in the Tulare County region. With the snowmelt runoff period essentially over, the figures are showing that the year was about 165% and 180% of normal for the Kaweah and San Joaquin River watersheds, respectively, from which TID draws its water supplies.

Our ongoing water run, which will extend into late September, began shortly after New Year's Day. When the run is over, we project annual total deliveries to exceed 300,000 AF, a figure very similar to last year. These deliveries have been meeting farmer irrigation needs as well as sustaining groundwater recharge operations by keeping basins within TID as full as possible during much of the run. Look to our 4th quarter issue of *TID Tidings* for a report on improved groundwater conditions as a result of this year's water operations.

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LOOK INSIDE...

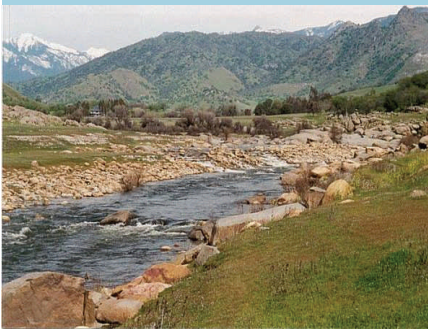
Water for the San Joaquin River

Planning Begins

2006 Water Supply— 2nd Banner Year

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

- | | |
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| October | 31 st Last day to pay water bills before transferred to taxes |
| November | 1 st Tax assessments mailed out |
| December | 7 th Lot segregation request form filing deadline
20 th 1 st installment is due |