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541 H St. - Los Banos, CA 93635

An informational newsletter for water users and landowners in the San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors' service area.

EXCHANGE p e r s p e c t i v e

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Storms bring good news; too early to forecast supply

Storms that swept across California in the waning days of October provided a welcome addition to much needed water supplies.

"These storms gave us a good boost to the water supply that all of California needs, especially those farmers who have endured several years of reduced supplies and uncertainty of how much water they would receive," said Steve Chedester, Executive Director of the San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors Water Authority.

According to Chedester, Shasta Reservoir began November with 2.7 million acre-feet in storage, up from 1.4 maf a year ago. The San Joaquin River also saw an increase in flows with an uptick in releases from Friant Dam, due to Reclamation's River Restoration Program, to 440 cfs.

"It's still early in the water year but it is good news as we keep our fingers crossed in the months to come," Chedester added. "If Mother Nature continues to smile on us, then we should be in good shape for the next growing year. However, we will still need to receive cooperation by those government agencies that regulate the movement of water from northern California and through the Sac-

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Authority hosts fishing derby

The C.A.S.T. for Kids Foundation, Exchange Contractors, and other agencies hosted a day of fishing, fun and enjoyment for disabled and disadvantaged children of the local community and their parents at the "O'Neil Forebay 2016." Each child received a free rod, reel, tackle box and plaque. More than 100 individuals enjoyed the day of fishing. The event provides an opportunity to increase community awareness of the challenges the children face. Many people of the Los Banos Community have also contributed toward the event. Above, children pictured with Steve Ched-



ester. Los Banos and Pacheco High School FFA members assist with preparations of a hamburger and hot dog BBQ lunch that was served.

Columbia Canal---

Conservation efforts result in increased efficiency

Shareholders in the Columbia Canal Company continue to march forward in increasing water use efficiency in the 16,560-acre mutual water company through a self-funding program that has brought Columbia to an estimated 85-90 percent efficiency rating.

It took only half-a-year in 2001 for Columbia's board of directors to gather information from other water districts on what they were doing to increase water efficiency before deciding to go to a "closed district," thus eliminating any water run-off into the San Joaquin River. Columbia Canal Company contacted Cal Poly San Luis Obispo to perform a district wide review for projects that would increase its water efficiency. After applying for and being denied State and federal funding sources for the planned projects, the directors opted to self-fund the efforts.

"The directors quickly decided to utilize revenue received from conserved water transfers to enhance local conservation efforts," recalled Randy Houk, General Manager. "Columbia's share-holders agreed with the directors by



Canals within Columbia Canal have undergone relining with cement and geomembrane material to reduce seepage.

approving a self-assessment to upgrade the existing irrigation systems and district water deliveries."

Houk explained that grants were made available to shareholders to undertake advancements in their irrigation practices, includ-

ing the releveled of land following harvest and the installation of drip/micro-irrigation systems, along with the construction of long crested weirs, regulating reservoirs and converting the water delivery system from earthen canals and ditches to cement and geomembrane lined. The shift to drip/micro-irrigation coincided with a change in cropping patterns that saw the once-dominant row crops give way to permanent crops.

"Today we have about 85 percent of our acreage planted to permanent crops," added Houk.

An initial \$3 million was raised to fund the conservation projects and that total has grown to \$15 million.

"Each year applications are received and reviewed by our directors to determine where the funds will be allocated," Houk said. "The directors also conduct an annual review of the process and decide whether to continue the fund-



Regulating reservoirs and drip irrigation systems installed by shareholders have increased water use efficiency.

ing. There has never been a hesitation on the part of the directors to keep the program going."

While on-farm projects have continued, Columbia has also been active in increasing its handling of water. Columbia's two main delivery canals, the Ridge and the Columbia Main, have undergone geomembrane lining to eliminate water loss. Lining of the Ridge has been completed and the remaining four miles of the Columbia Main are scheduled for completion later this year. Smaller laterals and delivery ditches are almost totally lined with cement.

"The combined on-farm and Columbia projects have dramatically reduced the amount of water losses in the district delivery system," Houk added. "This has provided more water to the head gates of our shareholders and reduced their ground water pumping demands. The increased plantings of permanent crops have also added to reduced run-off, thus enabling Columbia to have a closed system. We want to be good neighbors to neighboring districts by eliminating any run-off to the river.

"Any run-off is now captured and returned to the delivery system, which helps to reduce the reliance on groundwater pumping. At the time all this started, no one foresaw the groundwater regulations (Sustainable Groundwater Management Act) that have recently been approved by the State. The results of our conservation efforts will be a positive in responding to the new groundwater rules and the ongoing agricultural waivers regulations."

Authority joins JPA to increase water storage

The San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors Water Authority's decision to join what started as an east-side effort to increase water storage reflects the need to work together with other interests.

"We cannot afford the luxury of just sitting back and isolating ourselves," exclaimed Steve Chedester, Authority Executive Director. "Anything we can do that could reasonably improve water supplies in the San Joaquin Valley will benefit landowners and growers in the service area of our members."

Joining the San Joaquin Valley Water Infrastructure Authority JPA has resulted in Chedester being named to the board of directors. Chris White, General Manager of Central California Irrigation District, serves as chairman of the JPA's technical advisory committee.

The goal of the newly formed JPA is to facilitate new water infrastructure in the five counties it represents, according to Executive Director Mario Santoyo. "Our emphasis is the construction of Temperance Flat Dam but we are also looking ahead to establishing other projects such as

Water supply...

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ramento-San Joaquin Delta to contractors south of the Delta."

Chedester pointed out that water flowing into the Delta remains a question mark following proposals by the California State Water Resources Control Board. Recent proposals on San Joaquin River flows from eastside tributaries has raised the spectre of more water being earmarked from existing agricultural uses for environmental purposes. That would mean less water to grow food.

On the heels of the Water Board's announcement on the San Joaquin River proposal, it announced similar proposals on the Sacramento River. Both rivers would see a significant amount of water taken from existing users.

"The outcome of these proposals won't be known until next year and the impacts they will have on the water supply to farmers in the Exchange Contractor's service area is unknown," Chedester said. "Right now it is clear the SWRCB is pursuing an all-out attack on ag water uses in the name of environmental enhancement without the justification of hard science. We will remain involved in striving to protect our water supplies."

Coupled with the unknown future of the Water Board's proposals is the ongoing enforcement of biological opinions that protect salmon and smelt through the Delta.

groundwater recharge."

Temperance Flat Dam is projected to store 1.3 million acre-feet of water upon completion.

The five counties involved in the JPA are Merced, Madera, Fresno, Tulare and Kings. Members of the JPA and its board includes representatives from counties, cities, water agencies and a tribal council. Santoyo noted that other groups from the east side of the valley are also being sought for membership.

"To be successful in our efforts, particularly Temperance Flat, everyone needs to be at the table," Santoyo emphasized. "The Exchange Contractors hold majority water rights on the San Joaquin River and having them at the table providing guidance and support is indispensable."

The JPA's emphasis for the next 6-8 months is to secure funding from voter-approved Proposition 1, the Water Quality, Supply, and Infrastructure Improvement Act of 2014, to begin the early phases of making Temperance Flat Dam a reality. White's efforts with the technical advisory committee have been aimed in developing needed research and information that will support the JPA's application to the California Water Commission for funding.

"The guidelines for submitting funding applications should be completed by the end of the year by the Commission," Santoyo said. "We are working now to prepare our application by the middle of next year."

River restoration moves forward despite no new infrastructure

The Exchange Contractors Authority joined the San Luis Canal Company in submitting comments to the Bureau of Reclamation as the federal agency moves forward with the San Joaquin River Restoration Program.

"The Bureau continues to increase flows and release salmon into the river without completing any of the infrastructure projects called for in the negotiated settlement and implementing legislation," stated Steve Chedester, Authority Executive Director.

"We have met on multiple occasions with Bureau officials and expressed our concern that flows now making it past our facilities will increase the potential of species of concern fish making it up to our headworks and causing havoc on our water diversions," added Chedester. "We were told by the officials that they would work with us in developing new rules that would cover the species of concern and reduce any negative affects to our water operations. However, that is not assured and it is the Bureau's responsibility to mitigate known impacts."



San Joaquin River Exchange
Contractors Water Authority

PO Box 2115
Los Banos, CA 93635

Tel: 209.827.8616
Email: contactus@sjrecwa.net
Website: www.sjrecwa.net

Are new water policies forthcoming?

By Steve Chedester
Executive Director

Spending a few days in our nation's capital following the early-November elections provided an opportunity to reinforce the need for increased water storage in our state. It is too early to tell how policies will be enacted once President-elect Donald Trump is sworn into office on Inauguration Day.

Will these new policies be written to balance the water needs of Californians or will it be a continuation of the restrictive policies that have kept water users guessing each year as to how secure is their water supply?

Another major unknown at this time is who will be placed in charge of developing important water policies and who will compose the staff at the various agencies to carry out those policies.

Over the course of many years, relationships have been established with individuals within those agencies that deal with water. A level of rapport with certain agency personnel has been established through count-

less meetings. A trust factor has emerged as individuals displayed an openness to listen and learn about water in California.

Many times these meetings take place in their offices, which requires considerable time and expense in making the trip eastward. But the value of these trips is immeasurable when the result is a reliable water supply that our farmers depend upon.

Unfortunately, not all the individuals in these agencies have a willingness to listen with open minds and extend a hand of cooperation. We quickly learn that a different approach with these individuals must be taken.

How much change will take place that could result in new policies favorable to farmers who have long suffered from an uncertain water supply? Many of us want to think that these changes in policy are on the horizon. We will continue to actively pursue policy changes as we move forward.