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

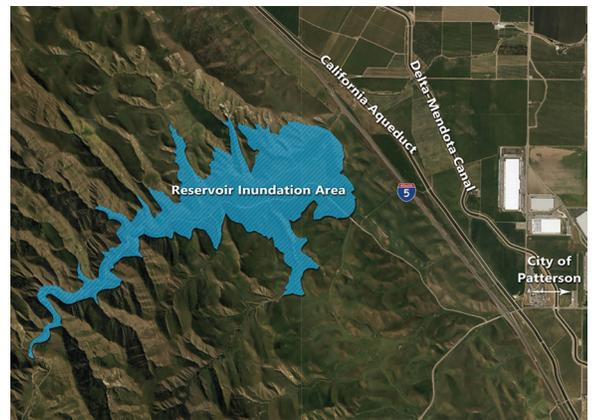
EXCHANGE perspective

MARCH 2020

Facility decision expected this year for new reservoir

A decision will be made by the end of this calendar year as to whether to move forward with the construction of Del Puerto Canyon Reservoir, a planned project west of Patterson that would hold 82,000 acre-feet of water.

An important part of the process to determine feasibility, according to Executive Director Chris White of the San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors Water Authority, is to complete the environmental process outlined by the State of California through CEQA and the federal government through NEPA. The public comment period for the Draft EIR under CEQA closed in late January and efforts are underway to consider all comments received.



Located west of the city of Patterson, the proposed Del Puerto Canyon Reservoir would have a capacity of 82,000 acre-feet.

"We expect to complete our review process and be at a point in November to make a decision whether to move forward," said White. "If the an-

swer is YES, then we will complete the design process and initiate construction in 2022."

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Water Supply Situation

The San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors have received a non-critical announcement from the Bureau of Reclamation that represents 100 percent of their contract supply for the current water year, reports Executive Director Chris White.

"The water supply notice came with a cautionary note from Reclamation saying that they are going to continue on a monthly basis to relook at the Shasta inflow forecast and keep the Exchange Contractors updated to any information on the allocation," added White.

White explained that the allocation is based on inflow projections into Shasta Reservoir. The February 1 inflow projection by the California Department of Water Resources was 3.6 million acre-feet. DWR updates its inflow projection each month.

"If the inflow projection drops to 3.2 million acre-feet, that will result in a critical

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Decades of data/managing groundwater leads to sustainable groundwater plan

More than three decades of gathering groundwater data paved the way for the submission of the plan to maintain the sustainability for groundwater among the four member agencies of the San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors Water Authority.

“We’ve been proactively managing our groundwater resources since the late 1980s,” emphasized Executive Director Chris White. “During that time, we have cooperatively worked with the counties and small communities on the west side regarding groundwater.”

The gathering and managing of information about groundwater and forging a trust with our westside partners has led to the submittal of a sound Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) to the Department of Water Resources. The GSP is a requirement of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act approved by the State Legislature and signed by then-Governor Jerry Brown in 2014.

Groundwater sub-basins identified as being critically overdrafted throughout the State were required to submit their GSP in January. The remaining sub-basins must submit their GSPs in January 2022. The goal is to bring all sub-basins within sustainable conditions by 2040. The main reason our basin is considered in overdraft is due to subsidence caused by pumping in adjacent basins.

One of the first actions under the 2014 Act was to form a Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA).

“We formed our GSA early in the process and the local cities reached out to us for assistance in forming their GSAs and developing their 20-year plan,” explained White.

“Because we’ve been working on groundwater management for so long,” he added, “we were able to develop our GSP that starts from the position of sustainability now and into the future.”

Following submission to DWR, all plans from the statewide GSAs will undergo a 60-day public comment period. DWR has a two-year window to review the GSPs and either approve or request modifications.

“We were fortunate that we were able to begin the process from a point of already being in balance between

groundwater extractions and the water that our farmers are putting back into the ground,” White said.

“During the past years we have constantly evaluated groundwater conditions and made adjustments to protect this valuable resource,” he said. “The development of the GSP will serve to strengthen our efforts to safeguard our groundwater.”

“Our groundwater information has been a product of old school efforts.”

While some GSAs throughout the state chose to undertake modeling as the basis of their plans, the Exchange Contractors were able to rely on actual numbers derived from years of groundwater studies.

“Our groundwater information has been a product of old school efforts,” White quipped. “We began to collect this information many years ago.”

“It was important that we understood the numbers we were gathering through our monitoring process in order to learn the physical characteristics of our groundwater. This was essential in learning about our aquifer.”

The 2014 Act also requires annual reports submitted by the GSAs to DWR.

“Again, we have been doing annual reports for 25-30 years; so, we are prepared to move forward on behalf of our landowners to safeguard their groundwater supply,” said White.

Water supply...

Continued from Page 1

year supply designation,” he said. “That would reduce our allocation by 25 percent.”

“While the current 100 percent allocation is certainly good news, it is important that our landowners pay close attention to any announcement from their water districts that could indicate a change in the delivery supply. Our agricultural neighbors, south of the Delta, will only receive 15 percent of their contracted supply,” White added.

NOTE – the DWR March 1st forecast for inflows into Shasta was slightly below 3.2 million acre-feet at 3.11 million acre-feet. If this dry condition persists then the Exchange Contractors are likely to be declared critical on or around March 15 – 20.

Authority members undertake design/build efforts for River Restoration projects

The design and construction of projects pivotal to the success of the San Joaquin River Restoration Program is being taken on by district members of the San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors Water Authority.

A Memorandum of Agreement was signed in January by the Exchange Contractors and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation that paves the way for the Exchange Contractors to facilitate the design and potentially build key facilities such as the Mendota Pool Control Structure and Sack Dam.

“We knew that we had to protect our landowners from endangered fish escaping the river and making it past the headworks of our delivery channels,” said Executive Director Chris White. “It became apparent that we had the experience to get these projects completed in a timely manner and, therefore, approached the Bureau and Restoration Program officials with a proposal for us to undertake the design and construction aspects.”

The projects are outlined in the San Joaquin River Settlement Act that was approved by Congress in 2009. Its purpose is to restore river and fish flows to the San Joaquin River that had diminished since the construction of Friant Dam.

“We’ve been working with the Bureau and the Restoration Program for a number of years and about 18 months ago we realized that the Bureau may have difficulty in getting the projects done by the Act’s 2025 deadline,” explained

Feasibility study...

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Many of the public comments focused on the effects on the 100-year flood plain and the safety of the facility, which will feature an earthen dam.

“We’re being very serious in this review of the comments in order to provide the necessary responses,” he added.

“We are also in the middle of the preliminary design process,” White added. “We are working closely with the various agencies—Department of Water Resources, State Water Resources Control Board, Division of Safety of Dams, Fish and Wildlife at both the State and federal levels—and the City of Patterson and Stanislaus County.”

Among other efforts during the design process have included visits to the site by tribal interests in order to

White. “So, the Exchange Contractors and its member districts offered to take on the responsibility to design and build the projects at the Bureau’s expense.”

That expense is estimated to be about \$70 million for the Mendota Pool work and perhaps an additional \$70 million at Sack Dam.

Another year remains in the design portion for the two projects and that will be followed by a two-year construction period.

Russ Callejo, Deputy Regional Director for the Bureau in its Sacramento office, visited the Exchange Contractors December board meeting.

“I like to get things done,” he said of the pending Memorandum of Agreement and moving forward with a workable time schedule for the needed projects.

“The MOA also allows the Exchange Contractors to assist in building projects that will be necessary in reducing the negative impacts of seepage when the river is at peak flows,” said White. “Again, this is being done to help implement the successful restoration of the river and to protect our landowners.”

While working directly with the Restoration Program and its member agencies, the Exchange Contractors will also keep other government agencies and involved NGOs updated on its progress.

review and address their concerns.

An aggressive work schedule is in place to determine the project feasibility from a cost benefit standpoint. The total cost for the project has yet to be finalized. However, \$1.5 million has been secured from federal funds to help the feasibility studies.

“Representative Josh Harder (D-Modesto) was instrumental in assisting us in obtaining the funding through the WIIN Act,” reported White. “His help is greatly appreciated and we’re hopeful for additional WIIN funding for future construction expenses should that be the outcome of the feasibility study.”

Representative Harder listed the Del Puerto Canyon Reservoir as one of the projects to receive funding in his pending legislation: H.R. 2473—Securing Access for the Central Valley and Enhancing (SAVE) Water Resources Act.



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Working to secure the future

*By Chris White
Executive Director*

In early 2019, the San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors Water Authority updated our Strategic Plan. The effort involved asking ourselves, “what will we look back upon in 20 years and be thankful that we accomplished today?” Two major factors were drivers in developing an action plan.

The first is the decline of the reliability of the State and Federal water projects in California. By 2010, it was becoming evident that the Federal Central Valley Project would not be able to deliver all of our Exchange Contract water in some dry years.

By 2012, we developed our first Water Resources Plan and started immediately to work on projects to provide for needed storage for our use. The Plan was updated last year to re-enforce the attainment of dispatchable storage.

The second major factor was the passage of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act of 2014

(SGMA) by the State of California. Recognizing that while we have been managing our groundwater basins sustainability for many years, other areas in our sub-basin will not meet that standard. Just this week Dr. David Sunding’s report on the economic impacts due to the sustainability mandated by SGMA identified that up to 1 million acres of farmland in the San Joaquin Valley will be permanently fallowed. That’s up to one-fifth of the acres under cultivation in the Valley.

So where did these factors lead us in our strategic planning effort? It reinforced need for storage and emphasized working with neighbors in this region. Our plan has groundwater and surface water storage projects that are being developed in cooperation with our neighbors and partners, State and Federal Government, Del Puerto, San Luis, Grassland, and Triangle T Water districts.

It’s an exciting time to be working for the Exchange Contractors!