



(( Spring 2013 ))

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

# EXCHANGE

perspective

May 2013

## STRATEGIC PLAN APPROVED TO GUIDE PRIORITIES OF EXCHANGE CONTRACTORS

**M**ember districts are actively engaged in a number of conservation and improvement projects related to water resources, drainage and outreach as part of the Exchange Contractors' newly approved Strategic Plan.

The Board of Directors of the Exchange Contractors at its regular meeting on March 1 approved their Strategic Plan, which will help guide and prioritize issues related to water supplies and conservation, drainage, educational and legislative outreach and more.

"We have already started implementing some components of the Strategic Plan. This living document will be a valuable tool for us to help guide us through these ever-changing and uncertain times," said Steve Chedester, Executive Director of the Exchange Contractors.

The Bureau's decision this year to allocate only 20 percent of surface water allocations to federal ag service contractors illustrates the uncertainty surrounding agricultural surface water deliveries in the San Joaquin Valley. While members of the Exchange Contractors were given a full allocation under senior water rights as a result of projected inflows into Shasta Lake, these dramatically reduced allocations to neighboring CVP farmers and districts potentially impact all irrigated farmland in the region.

They also illustrate the need for long-term planning to address these uncertainties and to help secure our water rights, the Exchange Contract and water deliveries for members of the

Exchange Contractors. The Strategic Plan has three basic components designed to address these and other issues: Water resources and supply, drainage, and legislative and educational outreach.

### Water Supply

The Board continues to implement components of a comprehensive Water Resources Plan, which takes a long-term look at water supply issues and projects to enhance the security of the water supply and delivery for members of the Exchange for years to come. One of those projects is Los Banos Creek Detention Dam, a partnership between members of the Exchange Contractors, the City of Los Banos, San Luis Water District, and Grassland Water District to reexamine the

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The foundation has been laid on a demonstration drainage water treatment plant to address salt accumulation and other drainage issues in the San Luis Unit. These projects are incorporated in the Exchange Contractors' newly approved Strategic Plan.

## STRATEGIC PLAN APPROVED TO GUIDE PRIORITIES

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Bureau-owned Los Banos Creek Detention Dam for additional water supply benefits.

Among other things, the project would lead to improved water supply reliability, better recharge of local runoff, enhance groundwater stability, recreational and environmental enhancements at and near the dam, and improvements in water supply and quality to a disadvantaged community water system.

The Exchange Contractors are also taking initial steps toward a potentially broader groundwater management program. The first project is a small pilot internal groundwater-recharge project that provides a mechanism to take surface water from any of the Exchange Contractors' members and recharge it into groundwater aquifers within our boundaries for later use during critical years pursuant to the Exchange Contract.

The initial small-scale pilot project could become a model for other similar water projects in the Exchange Contractors to manage resources in a way that provides operational flexibility for growers within the service area, particularly in critical water years when surface deliveries are uncertain or in short supply.

"Our purpose is to have dry year or critical year reliability and the flexibility within the Exchange Contractors' boundaries to meet our growers' needs even during times when we have reduced surface water deliveries," Chedester said. "These projects, along with increased flexibility in negotiating water transfer agreements, regulating reservoirs and other improvements over the next few years will help give us that flexibility."

### Drainage

Firebaugh Canal Water District continues to seek projects to address drainage issues. Construction is on schedule on one such project, a pilot treatment plant intended to provide agricultural drainage service to the San Luis Unit and adjacent areas. This particular plant will treat drainage water for Grassland area farmers, comprised of Panoche Drainage District, Firebaugh Canal Water District, Pacheco Water District, Charleston 13 Drainage District and the Camp 13 Drainage District. The pilot project will incorporate a number of potential technologies to address salt and water balance issues in drainage impaired lands in the area. Some of those technologies include reverse osmosis, microfiltration and a proprietary biological treatment system for selenium removal.

The Bureau of Reclamation-funded demonstration plant will occupy a 4-acre area at Althea and Russell Avenues in the Firebaugh area. Pipelines will divert drainage water from existing reuse sumps in the San Joaquin River Improvement Project (SJ RIP) reuse area to the demonstration plant where it will be treated. The pilot plant will determine if these technologies can address drainage issues related to the accumulation of selenium and other salts resulting from irrigation in the region that has accumulated in the shallower root zone.

The project study area covers more than 700,000 acres on the Westside, including more than 85,000 acres of farmland in the northern sub-region of the San Luis Unit. About half that 85,000 acres are affected by drainage impairments.

### Outreach

The Exchange Contractors has established a standing Legislative Committee, composed of managers and a board member or landowner from each member agency to oversee legislative outreach priorities for the Exchange Contractors.

The committee is working to address legislative issues that impact fees, water rights, water transfers and proposed water bonds, groundwater management and other issues of importance to agricultural water users. It has met twice this year to peruse some of the 2,000 bills submitted before the California legislature and narrow them down and give guidance to consultants and staff on whether the Exchange should take positions on those bills and what legislative priorities should be for the coming year.

Representatives of the Exchange and its member agencies are also working with local legislators, landowners, agencies and others on outreach and education on issues of interest to members of the Exchange Contractors, including water bonds, water rights, fees and groundwater issues.

Outreach has also focused on opportunities to educate decision makers about the subsidence issues on the west side of Madera and Merced Counties.

Both CCID and SLCC are taking a lead in developing potential solutions to significantly slow down subsidence in those areas that directly impact their diversion facilities and other physical infrastructure. In recent months they have held tours and other outreach opportunities to spread the word about the subsidence problem in order to garner federal, state and local support for proposed solutions.

## LONG-TERM WATER TRANSFER PROGRAM APPROVED

The Exchange Contractors have certified and adopted the final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) on a Long-Term Water Transfer Program. The Bureau of Reclamation by June will issue a Record of Decision certifying the federal Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), clearing the way for the program.

The program will extend the current 10-year water transfer program through 2038. The program expands transfers of conserved water by up to an additional 20,000 acre-feet under certain specified conditions for a total of up to 100,000 acre feet of developed water from conservation measures, and up to 50,000 acre-feet of water from temporary land fallowing.

## WESTSIDE COALITION TIMELINE CONTINUES DESPITE RECENT LEGAL RULING

The Regional Board is expected to hold a workshop in Los Banos on July 30th on a draft order for the Westside San Joaquin River Watershed Coalition, which the Exchange Contractors are part of, to comply with new requirements of the Long-Term Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program.

The Regional Board is moving forward on developing a draft order for the Westside Coalition despite a recent tentative Superior Court ruling that environmental reviews used to support the recently adopted Eastern SJR Watershed Coalition were deficient.

The court is expected to issue a final ruling in July, which could impact the adoption of the Eastside Coalition order and additional orders scheduled for six other Central Valley Coalitions. The order for the Westside Coalition is currently expected to be adopted by December 2013.

The court order does raise some uncertainty on the future timeline of adoption and other aspects of Waste Discharge Requirements under the Long-Term Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program. However the Regional Board has not made changes to requirements or timelines of the program. The board did say it will not take final votes on the remaining Waste Discharge Requirements until those environmental review issues are resolved.

New requirements for the Westside Coalition are expected to model those adopted for the Eastern SJR Coalition in December 2012.

"We expect they are going to be very similar to the Eastside order though we may end up with slightly different timelines for when things are due," said David Cory, a farmer and consultant with the Westside Coalition. "We are attempting to modify those time schedules into something that will be more realistic for us to comply."

Key components of the new orders include the regulation of discharges to groundwater in addition to current surface water programs. Groundwater requirements are likely to include nitrogen management plans and farm evaluations for each farm and potentially sediment management plans where sediment movement is an issue. Growers may also be required to implement practices to minimize discharges of nitrates and salts to groundwater.

To meet the costs of complying with these new requirements, the San Joaquin Valley Drainage Authority steering committee in January adopted dues for the 2013-14 fiscal year of \$4 per acre, up from \$3.12 the previous year. Costs will increase further as the new order is implemented and the budget and associated assessments will likely reflect those increased costs. In addition to new monitoring and reporting requirements, the orders are expected to contain an educational component requiring growers to attend outreach events related to water quality in their area.

The Coalition will work closely with the water agencies in the Exchange Contractors and elsewhere to implement and communicate components of the outreach and other Coalition activities.



*The Exchange Contractors annually participate in activities for Henry Miller Ag Day in local schools. Here, Patty Baldini of the Exchange Contractors makes a presentation to a local elementary school about local water resources during the Henry Miller Ag Day in April.*



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## 20 YEARS OF SERVICE AS THE EXCHANGE CONTRACTORS

This year marks the 20th anniversary the four member entities opened their doors and became a Joint Powers Authority that formed the San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors Water Authority.

A lot has changed in those two decades and while members of the Exchange Contractors have the good fortune of holding some of the oldest water rights in the state dating back to the 1870s, we are aware that threats to the future of agricultural surface water deliveries are all around us. When our neighboring ag service contractors receive only 20 percent of their contractual allocation, it is reason for everyone who relies on surface water to irrigate their crops to take pause.

The Exchange Contractors continue to focus on its mission of securing the water rights of its members, though over the last 20 years since that Joint Powers Authority was signed it has seen its responsibilities toward that mission expand. We will continue to meet with legislative and agency leaders and our neighboring districts in the San Joaquin Valley on water supply, drainage and distribution issues of importance to all of us and we look forward to the challenges and opportunities that are ahead.

Sincerely,  
Steve Chedester

Executive Director  
San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors Water Authority

