

Water Horizons

December 2005

Valley Water Alliance Update

VWA Members Meet With Valley Legislators

The Valley Water Alliance (VWA) board of directors have been busy meeting with elected officials on the state and federal level in the Friant service area. Spending the past few weeks while the California State Legislature and Congress have been out of session meeting with our elected leaders to convey the purpose and activities of the VWA has been successful. The primary purpose of the meetings has been to update representatives about VWA's communication efforts and distribute the white papers and background materials for their reference. VWA president, Joel Nelsen stated, "All the meetings have been positive and several of the elected officials have expressed surprise at the extent of our success. Our efforts are being noticed!" Meetings will continue through early 2006 as the State Legislature reconvenes and Congress prepares to go back into session.

Feinstein and Radanovich Continue to Seek Resolution

As the New Year approaches the VWA would once again like to extend their appreciation to Senator Dianne Feinstein and Congressman George Radanovich for their continued efforts to find consensus in the on-going dispute between Friant Water Users Authority and the Natural Resource Defense Council. At press time, the VWA is optimistic a resolution will be reached with regards to the long running litigation which focuses on restoring portions of the San Joaquin River with water from Friant Dam. It is anticipated a resolution to the case will bring water supply certainty to Friant water users and the numerous communities who rely upon vital San Joaquin River water supplies for their survival.

Preparing for a Comeback - 2006 State Legislative Session

In 2005 the Valley Water Alliance led the charge to stop ill-conceived legislation by Senator Machado (SB 350) that sought to codify Judge Karlton's preliminary judgment to re-water the San Joaquin River and establish a once "native" fish habitat without taking into consideration the social, cultural and economic impacts to the region. VWA worked with Assembly Members McCarthy, Parra, Cogdill, Mathews, Maze and Villines to detain the legislation in committee, never letting the bad idea make it out for a vote.

However, VWA will leave nothing to chance and fully expects Senator

Machado to make another effort to resurrect SB 350 during the 2006 legislative session. VWA members have worked diligently to educate and advocate against SB350 and we encourage our supporters to remind their elected officials of the need to call upon their constituencies for input when reviewing similar legislation which impacts our water supplies.

The Editor Makes a Heartfelt Apology

We regretfully misinformed our readership in the November newsletter and would like to correct an inaccurate statement. We mis-stated that a contribution was recently received from Bank of the West. While Bank of the West has made its own sizeable contribution to VWA in the past, we were actually attempting to recognize Bank of the Sierra for their generous contribution to the Valley Water Alliance. Please accept our most humble apologies.

The generous contributions by VWA supporters like Bank of the Sierra makes a significant difference in our ability to reach out to our elected officials and the numerous communities who will be impacted as a result of any water loss from the San Joaquin River. It is only through reaching out to the public, our elected officials and the media that we will be able to succeed in our efforts. Thank you Bank of the Sierra for stepping up and making a BIG difference.

Board of Directors Meeting

The VWA board of directors held a meeting to receive an update from officers Dale Brogan and Joel Nelsen on December 16, 2005. Members in attendance received an activities update from members and staff, and planned their outreach and advocacy efforts for the coming year. The board continued to discuss how the VWA will only be successful in protecting San Joaquin River water supplies and preserving the economic future of the region if they are working with all interests, from Merced to Kern County.

To that end, at the December meeting of the VWA board of directors, the Kings County Board of Supervisors was invited to join the board. Kings County Supervisor Jon Rachford, who attended the meeting, accepted the invitation to take back to his board colleagues in Kings County for consideration. Rachford acknowledged the importance of the issue to all communities in the region. The Kings County Board of Supervisors passed a supporting resolution of the Valley Water Alliance and their efforts in September 2005.

Join VWA in Our Outreach Efforts

The Alliance encourages you to continue your efforts in educating and advocating your friends, neighbors, business associates, community groups and elected officials. Without reaching out and telling our story we will not be able to make a difference as the fight for San Joaquin River water continues.

Please contact the Valley Water Alliance at info@valleywateralliance.org if you have any questions or need additional information. To be placed on the Alliance's mailing list, or to provide edits or submissions for our monthly newsletter please contact Alfreda Sebasto at info@valleywateralliance.org or call 559-291-0184.

A Long Time Coming • A Settlement May Be Near Over Uses of San Joaquin River Water.

In the late fall of 2005 the VWA and members of the Friant Water Users met with the Fresno Bee editorial board. The VWA would like to extend their appreciation to board members Fred Ruiz and Lionel Pires for participating in the meeting and bringing the Fresno Bee up-to-date regarding San Joaquin River water and related issues.



Farmers and environmentalists have been clawing and scratching at each other for nearly two decades over the San Joaquin River and the water behind Friant Dam. As hard as it may be for some longtime observers to believe, a settlement may be in sight.

On Friday, U.S. District Judge Lawrence Karlton in Sacramento gave the two sides a 30-day delay in the lawsuit brought by environmentalists to force restoration of the river. The San Joaquin now runs dry during much of the year at two points along its 230-mile course from Friant Dam north to the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta.

Back in 2004, Karlton ruled that restoration must take place. Since then there have been negotiations in an effort to find a compromise that would protect farmers who use the Friant water for irrigation, while adding enough flow to make the San Joaquin a true river once more. There are also some cities that get Friant water - including Fresno - whose interests must be guarded.

One reason for the delay is that the federal government, the main

defendant in the environmentalists' lawsuit, has not signed off yet on any agreement. And all the separate water districts that make up the Friant Water Users Authority, which represents some 15,000 farmers, mostly on the east side of the Valley, have had a chance to examine the settlement. Other agencies have been doing the same thing.

Such a compromise - if it finally happens - would be historic. Fighting over water has been a constant passion in California since before statehood.

When Friant Dam was built a half-century ago, it dried up a river that once supported a salmon run, and was navigable by large vessels from Fresno to San Francisco Bay. Environmentalists have dreamed for years of seeing at least some of that restored.

But the dam also allowed the creation of a multibillion-dollar farm economy on the east side of the Valley, one that is inextricably intertwined with the lives of everyone hereabouts. That cannot - that must not - be dismissed.

A compromise that manages to win approval - however grudging it may turn out to be - from such powerful antagonists would be something remarkable.

But such an outcome - a healthier river and a still-vibrant farm economy - is something we should all profoundly desire. Cross your fingers.

Fresno Bee Editorial, Sunday, January 8, 2006

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Our Water, Our Future.