

# Water Wrights



Friant Water Authority April 23, 2020

By Don A. Wright

**T**he **Friant Water Authority** board of directors met by teleconference on Thursday, April 23, 2020. The meeting began in closed session and was supposed to commence in open session at 10:30am. One of the things about working from home is having to work from home. I had an electrician out this morning to finalize some work that needed to be done on my house. I wasn't able to reschedule him and it didn't occur to me to request Friant delay starting the meeting until I could join. So, I'm telling on myself here but I was a half hour late and missed some things. Decades of experience tell me the meeting began with a prayer and all the "housekeeping" items like minutes and agenda and such were successfully approved.

Coming out of closed session it was reported by Chairman **Chris Tantau** the board has authorized Friant to participate in a collective CEQA lawsuit to be brought by multiple California water agencies against the California Department of Water Resources regarding recent action taken with



respect to the long-term operations of the State Water Project. This has to do with the Incidental Take Permit. DWR did the CEQA process and it failed to consider those impacts.

When I joined the meeting state government consultant **Mike Villines** was speaking. Villines said there will be a stimulus bill that will not necessarily provide funds but will trim back the red tape for businesses to move forward. Can you imagine? In California? Too good to be true? Let's hope not. State Senator **Melissa Hurtado** has stated that although there is an official request from the senate leadership to limit the number of bills presented she will continue to push for state money for the repair of the Friant Kern Canal. He said Governor **Gavin Newsom** is expected to announce some relaxation of CEQA requirements but it isn't know how far that will go. It could be just a way to smooth out the process to set up more tent cities for the homeless or could include other infrastructure and development projects.

Federal consultant **Johnny Amaral** said the federal legislature was planning on take up business again on May 4<sup>th</sup> but this date has been pushed back several times already. He said President **Donald Trump** has been tweeting a lot about including infrastructure as part of any stimulus packages. There will be a financing workshop coming up for Friant and that will be an important look at many pieces of the puzzle.

The water report was next and last week the US Bureau of Reclamation announced the supplies from Shasta has been reduced to 75 percent. This doesn't mean the Bureau doesn't have to send water

to the Exchange Contractors, it just doesn't have to send the as much. One of the underlying tensions each spring of a less than normal water year is what will the Bureau do? Will the Bureau be able to meet its obligations to providing the Exchange Contractors their contractual amount? For two years during the last drought for the first time ever Friant got a zero surface water allocation. The water was sent to the Exchange Contractors. It was a shock to the system and is now a consideration when allocations are being considered.

**FWA CEO Jason Phillips** asked staff to put the information regarding San Luis Reservoir storage in graph form. He said this is a crucial bit of information to determine what happens with San Joaquin River water, a call on Friant for Exchange Contractor supplies and South of Delta supplies in general. Staff said April numbers are not doing too bad in trending. The Cross Valley Canal contractors are impacted by the state's moving control of the State Water Project from DWR to the Fish & Wildlife incidental take permits. The CVC water supply is now unknown. If I understand correctly at this point the state won't allow federal water to be moved under this arrangement. Lower Tule and Pixley ID will be directly impacted by this incidental take permit.

Phillips said Friant was meeting with California Secretary of Resources **Wade Crowfoot** before the coronavirus and had brought up the fact that diminishing CVC conveyance will contribute to subsidence in the Valley.

Next **Ian Buck McLeod** said the Airborne Snow Observatory's original flights were screwed up and since then more flights at no charge have taken since the recent storms and that has been helpful. The Bureau was able to take this data into consideration. There will be another flight next week. FWA allocations have been bumped up from 40 to 55 percent. Storage on the upper SJR by Southern California Edison will play into Millerton Lake inflow. Restoration Project flows have increased due to the recent storms. The Bureau sent in a permit request to get restoration flows from the SJR at Patterson ID and Banta Carbona ID to the State Board. The State Board hasn't responded timely due to coronavirus and recapture hasn't been taking place because the State Board hasn't given the necessary permit.

Phillips said one of the reasons for this is there hasn't been a permanent permit as the pump back component for the FKC's water quality portion needs to be wrapped up. It's not good for the State Board to be making extensions for the permitting.

USBR's **Michael Jackson** was next with his two bits. Phillips thanked Jackson for working so cooperatively. Jackson said much of his report has been covered. He said the increased allocation wasn't that difficult once some other matters on the CVP system were dealt with. He said the Bureau is about to send out letters covering the allocation updates. He said O&M rates for FWA's contribution to the San Luis portion of the CVP have been negotiated if I understood correctly but there are a couple of updates that need to be smoothed over. A draft will be provided to those who need it. Jackson reminded everyone this negotiation is with the FWA and not individual Friant contractors. I got the feeling Jackson thinks the negotiations shouldn't be too onerous – semantics more than policy. Orange Cove ID's GM Fergus Morrison asked about flood flows this spring and Jackson said there looks like there will be plenty of storage but that will depend on how long the higher temperatures forecast for this weekend will last. So, it's possible but who knows at this point? If demands stay low and run off gets a big bump there could be flood flows.

The San Joaquin Valley Water Blueprint was next and **Austin Ewell** said the executive committee did meet but the large group meeting was cancelled. A summary of the exec committee revealed there has been significant progress with Self Help Enterprise and ongoing talks with other NGOs. There is still some heavy lifting to get more environmental groups input and Fresno State University is helping to facilitate more interaction. Senator Hurtado has been very helpful with her

Chief of Staff singled out for praise. The Phase II economic study is underway and the goal is to get this in front of Governor Newsom. **Scott Hamilton** presented a working draft on what projects could be helpful. The Kings River folks have commented and Ewell asked anyone with comments to contact him. He also thanked Arvin Edison's Steve Collup and others for helping with outreach. He also said there won't be much happening in Washington DC until the congress meets again.

Phillips asked to have some of Hamilton's work presented at next month's meeting. He said there's a lot of good work coming out of that. He added while everyone is working on GSP projects and there could be some mutual benefits to the Blueprint but keep in mind these are two different scenarios. He asked everyone working with the NGOs like the Environmental Defense Fund to remember the Blueprint is working towards helping groundwater needs and not to view the GSPs as the silver bullet. In my opinion EDF has been surprisingly cooperative and I think this NGO may become a valuable partner with the Blueprint. I'm also confident the Blueprint would appreciate a better relationship and I see some light on the end of the tunnel's horizon to torture a metaphor or is it a simile or an allegory?

Chairman **Chris Tantau** said FWA hopes to have a better digital format for next month's meeting. Digital board packets for non Friant officials and more video I believe can be expected. He thanked everyone for their cooperation as the new challenges of digital meetings are experienced. Friant has good staff in place – I'll bet you \$5 right now you won't see any problems experienced this month repeated next month. That was that.

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The Friant Water Authority is a Joint Powers Agreement with 15 districts to operate and maintain the Friant Division of the Central Valley Water Project. Water from the San Joaquin River is diverted at Friant Dam at Millerton Lake to the Madera/Chowchilla Canal to the north and the Friant/Kern Canal to the south. More than one million acres of mostly family farms and numerous communities get their surface supplies from the Friant Division.

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