

Kern Water Bank Authority February 4, 2020

By Don A. Wright

The **Kern Water Bank Authority** held its board of directors meeting on Tuesday, February 4, 2020 at its Bakersfield headquarters. If you've been reading these reports for any time you may be aware the two fastest meetings in the Valley take place in Kern County. The **KWB** is a textbook example of how to run a meeting. I'm not saying that to butter Chairman **Bill Phillimore** but at 3:00pm things start and you have to sit up straight and pay attention.

The meeting began with a photo of a sandhill crane taken by General Manager **Jon Parker**. They are not that rare, certainly not endangered or threatened, just not a bird usually hanging out at the water bank. The water bank is an oasis of peace in my experience. The only time I've been there was for an anniversary celebration and there were a lot of folks there, but it was still peaceful.



Phillimore announced the meeting may go into closed session when the regular business is completed but there will be an item that will require two directors to excuse themselves at 4:00pm for a matter. Honestly, I'm curious more for the procedural oddity. I've been on boards and went into closed session and it's only mysterious for about a minute. Unless you enjoy legalese.

The minutes were approved and controller **Danelle Lopez** gave the treasurer's report and the accounts payable. She did her usual outstanding job and got both approved. There was something about since the KWB switched to Union Bank they make more interest with a lower balance.

The next item dealt with the KWB representatives for the Kern Groundwater Authority now that **Bill Taube** is no longer there. The board needs to appoint someone. The other kind of similar issue is the officers for the KWB itself. There is no vice chair at this time. Wheeler Ridge Maricopa WSD GM **Sheridan Nicholas** was elected vice chair whether he liked it or not. No one wanted Phillimore's job. The always brilliant **Kim Brown** suggested Provost & Pritchard's **Dale Melville** take the KGA slot. Everyone liked that.

Parker started giving reports and said recovery from the bank has started with I believe Dudley Ridge asking for 1,300 a/f. The biggest source of water is the State Water Project 61 percent, Kern River is next at 25 percent and Friant water makes less than 15 percent of the recharge source. He reported the long awaited bike path will start construction this summer.

Parker showed the capitalized maintenance work with 40 out of 200 basin structures and road crossings completed. Four are in progress. This is a multi-year project. There is a siphon on the Strand system that surprised folks on how much it will cost. There is an old, corrugated piece of steel pipe that is beginning to corrode and need replacements. There are a couple of valves in the new design and the two bids came in around \$425,000. Nicholas Construction won the bid. No relation to Sheridan. Director **Dennis Atkinson** pointed out it's a wonder how engineering firms design these projects,

construction firms study the plans to give a bid and somehow or other there always ends up change orders. Some of the engineering firms taking place in SGMA planning here in the Valley can come in at a lower bid, get the job and pile on the change orders. I'm not naming names but you know who you are.

For active water banks wells are foundational. Director **Rob Yraceburu** pointed out the cost new wells is relatively way lower than during the drought if there is any drilling needing to be done now would be a good time. There are other wells on the bank needing refurbishing. Director **Jason Gianquinto** of Semitropic WSD said it is better to get the wells in shape now. Superintendent **Nick Torres** said there are only about five wells on the bank that are severely under-performing. Atkinson said the big problem is drilling new holes. He said you can pull the hardware and move it over to another hole. There is also the need for more power. PG&E can take time to hook up a new pump service and some of the old pumps to be replaced need will need more power. Phillimore said be ready now to upgrade before there is a change. Could he have been alluding to the threat of the California government taking over the utility. He didn't say that or imply that – but I haven't heard anyone yet beside Bay Area elected officials who believe that could be a good thing. I have to say I'm pretty skeptical the gang who brought us High Speed Rail would be better at supplying me power than PG&E. I've contacted State Senator **Scott Weiner's** office asking for an example of the State of California taking over a private utility to anyone's benefit.*

There are also improvements to the Kern Water Bank Canal needing to be completed. The problem is, and it's not a bad problem, they've hit shallow water. Some of this work is being done in conjunction the Kern County Water Agency since there is a need to de-water the canal and there have been problems getting a meeting date carved in stone.

There are more than 300 head of cattle grazing on the bank. Habitat conservation easements need to get recorded by the State Fish & Wildlife. F&W had folks touring the bank recently and Parker said an antelope ground squirrel was spotted and confirmed. F&W got excited and that may mean higher revenue from mitigation sales.

Parker said the all the KGA GSPs have been submitted. I've heard so far this week every sub basin in the Valley made the deadline.

The meeting then went into closed session.

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KERN WATER BANK AUTHORITY

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Staff: Jon Parker-General Manager, Danelle Lopez-Accountant, Steve Torigiani-Attorney, Nick Torres-Superintendent

Board: William Phillimore-Chair Westside Mutual Water Company, William Taube-Vice Chair Wheeler Ridge Maricopa Water Storage District, Steve Jackson-Treasurer Dudley Ridge Water District, Dennis Atkinson Tejon Castac Water District, David Beard KCWA Improvement District 4, Wilmar Boschman Semitropic Water Storage District & Kim Brown Westside Mutual Water Company

Located on a large, undeveloped section of the Kern River's sandy alluvial fan, the Kern Water Bank covers nearly 30 square miles over California's southern San Joaquin Valley. Ideally situated, both for its unique geology and its proximity to water supply and delivery systems, the Kern Water Bank plays a dual role in California's economically vital agricultural heartland.

