

Water Wrights



Tulare Irrigation District April 14, 2020

By Don A. Wright

The **Tulare Irrigation District** held its board of directors meeting by teleconference on Tuesday, April 14, 2020. There were two call-in/video methods to reach the meeting and things started out a little rocky as we all got used to the situation. There was a good deal of echo and unintelligible, muffled sound but things were soon straightened out. General Manager **Aaron Fukuda** is, after all, an engineer and those guys and gals think different about problem solving. Fortunately there are those who walk among us unintimidated by technology. I've often wondered what our civilization would be like if guys like me were in charge. I remember a cartoon about cavemen trying to invent the wheel. They started off with a square and someone came up with the triangle – one less side to bump – I could relate. If the English portion of the instruction is more than a quarter inch thick I'm not interested. So, good for Fukuda.



TID Chairman **Dave Bixler** called the meeting to order about 9:10am and things dived down into closed session. Fukuda invited the public to go on hold for an hour or so and meditate in the silence on TID's virtual breakfast burritos. A suggestion in most circumstances preferable to listening to a lo-fi recording of a continuous loop of smooth jazz ear pudding.

I called back at 10:07am and the board was still in closed session. Water Master **Marco Crenshaw** was waiting on hold with me but I couldn't get him to tell me a story. He and Superintendent **Wayne Fox** can come up with some pretty good fishing tails on occasion. I notice my Microsoft solitaire icon has changed. I wish things would quite changing and popping up on my computer.

At 10:21 things started up again with a break. Fukuda thanked everyone for attending and introduced a new term for me – country net. It's like the internet but slower. He also laid out some ground rules for happy, healthy, hygienic conference calls. I was on the telephone option so I couldn't see who all was on. But it was announced there was a full quorum with a couple of celebrity meeting attendees such as **Johnny Galey** and Bakersfield attorney **Doug Gosling**.

Fukuda announced the board reached a purchase agreement for some property near Woodlake during closed session. The minutes were approved and Crenshaw gave his report. Inflow at Lake Kaweah and the other mid-Sierra lakes is up. Northern California didn't change as much as Central and Southern California from the recent storms. Fukuda reported the data from the latest Airborne Snow Observatory flight was corrupted and there was an additional flight yesterday at no additional charge. This worked out well since the recent storms should increase the snowpack and increase the allocations. Crenshaw ran through some possible scenarios based on similar, historical precedent of low water supply years. There was a higher than normal rainfall total at the TID HQ yard. Crenshaw

recommended waiting until the next meeting to make a final decision as the CVP supply could increase as new snow is figured in. There are also several acres with new trees that have a lower demand at this stage of growth.

Next Fox gave the operations and maintenance report for the first quarter. TID is big on employee safety and it's reflected by its better insurance rates. Of course training included COVID-19 protocol. The ditch banks were a subject of much maintenance. The banks and canal require weed and erosion control as well as the occasional dredging for silt removal. Fox reported the SCADA and earthwork on the recharge basin is coming along well. The board had no questions.

Fukuda said the COVID-19 situation is in flux. The TID offices are closed to the public and there is a good deal of folks like to pay cash at the office for assessments. These are overwhelmingly small landowners with fees of less than \$40. The problem is if they don't pay on time there's a penalty of like \$.80 for one acre or less, not much. But to publish and notice the penalty under legal requirements will cost \$35 more than the fee. There is also no procedure in place to waive the penalty for those who come by to pay and find the office closed. A paybox attached to the headquarters was suggested but there has been a good sized uptick in burglary attempts on the equipment yard. So the board approved changing the penalty to reflect the operating conditions under the virus. Fukuda said Governor **Gavin Newsom** is scheduled to make an announcement today about opening portions of the state to a more normal footing. How knows what that means? It could be a postponement for later this year or other news.

Controller **Kathi Artis** gave her report. TID will be sending out \$1.2 million worth of invoices. Artis walked the board through the various components of the books and the board approved her report and paying the bills. There was a question about a battery and it turned out it was for an automatic defibrillator. This is the kind that you hook the paddles to the patient, let go and it figures out how much juice to pump into him.

The engineering report was next on the agenda. **Jeremy Barroll** reported an emergency spill structure was completed at a district facility. The recharge facility will get a barbed wire fence. The district will put in the contact posts and the contractor will fill in the t-posts and wire. SCADA will also be installed and things will be ready to roll. Director **Mike Thomas** asked if money from an earlier grant covered the fence and the answer was sort of. The cost of the fence came out of the cost share portion. Fukuda said he and Barroll are working on a new grant source and to get ready the district will be asking landowners about their projected needs. This information will be incorporated into the proposed facility design.

Fukuda reported on TID's response to COVID-19. He said the district is considered an essential service. Fox immediately outfitted district vehicles with wash stations, staff is no longer allowed to congregate in the break room and must maintain the six-foot space. As stated earlier the offices are no longer open to the public. Certain office staff are working from home. For those with no work at the moment vacation, sick and comp time is allowed. Fukuda is concerned about an employee coming in to work with exposure and the entire office would have to be shut down for two weeks. He asked the board about this scenario. He said there is also a case where another district might hit the coronavirus wall and TID would have to step in and help.

Bixler said to of course avoid shutting down unless it was absolutely necessary to keep people safe. Director **Rick Borges** suggested rotating schedules for employs whose duties prevent them working at home. Fukuda said he's committed to working six days a week and taking one day off to help his wife with their young child. Thomas said there has been one grower in TID who died last Friday. The man was 72-years old. There isn't a good answer but it is evident TID's management, staff

and board is dealing with the new, unprecedented landscape to the very best of their considerable abilities.

SGMA was next and Fukuda said a new committee is forming and there needs to be a landowner on it. Director **Dave Martin** drew the lucky short straw to serve on the Regional Conservation I-something S-something committee. TID will also be preparing the water marketing strategy for the Kaweah Sub Basin. This will be another committee formed to come up with ideas. The Mid Kaweah GSA has received some comments on its GSP. It was disappointing to have received a negative comment from the California Department of Fish & Wildlife, an entity that never participated in any of the GSP development. The CDFW's letter was boiler plate, sent in responses to most of the GSPs. In fact it wasn't even "customized" to the individual recipients. The letter include references to the San Luis Delta Mendota GSP where the MKGSA should have gone. Interesting that the department of the state now in charge of the State Water Project is so lax.

Fukuda added the search to find a new MKGSA General Manager should be postponed until the coronavirus situation eases up. Current GM Paul Hendrix wants to retire. Hendrix retired once as GM of TID and did a great deal of heavy lifting to get the MKGSA up and running. Fukuda will be stepping in as interim GM.

Fukuda also gave the Friant report saying there will be an April 29th special meeting focused on financing the repairs of the Friant Kern Canal. Borges sits as TID representative on the Friant Water Authority board. He said this is a much needed meeting to ensure the funding is in place before any construction begins. Title transfer of the FKC will some come to a decision, if not this month then by the May meeting, most likely, May. At one point having FWA take title of the FKC from the US Bureau of Reclamation looked like a good idea but we'll see.

There was no legislation to discuss, a rare point in our history where the politicians were quiet. In an unrelated matter the TID strategic plan wasn't ready for today's meeting.

The district needs a new safe and there are two donors who stepped up. **Richard Zack**, author of the TID history and the Largomarsino family have been generous. In appreciation the board passed two resolutions thanking both parties.

Board member reports were next and Borges began saying the Friant matters are moving along with teleconference meetings or the various committees. On the Kaweah River he reported any new owners of the power plant at Lake Kaweah will be bound by the current water rights. Martin reported both the Farmersville and Okieville drinking water kiosk have been fitted with some special filters for the surrounding communities. Thomas reported on the Wachumna (sp?) Water Company cleared up a boundary dispute.

That was that. Not a bad meeting. Had the closed session gone last – and my sense is it probably will – it would have been finished sooner than usual. I once asked a prominent water attorney if there is any really good reason for holding closed session at the beginning of a meeting. Sometimes there are items on the closed session that have to be resolved as they have a direct impact on the items in open session and sometimes the tee time for the attorney's game with the judge has been moved. It's really a case by case matter.

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TULARE IRRIGATION DISTRICT

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Board: David G. Bixler- President, Richard S. Borges, Jr.-Vice President, Scott Rogers, Dave Martin & Michael Thomas

Staff: Aaron Fukuda-General Manager, Jeremy Barroll-Engineer, Kathi Artis-District Controller, Wayne Fox-Superintendent, Marco Crenshaw-District Watermaster & Alex Peltzer-Attorney.

About: The Tulare Irrigation District was organized September 21, 1889. The original proposal for the formation of an irrigation district covering 219,000 acres, extending from the Sierra Nevada foothills to Tulare Lake, was eventually reduced to 32,500 acres. The District continued in this status until January of 1948 when the so-called Kaweah Lands" (approximately 11,000 acres) were annexed. In October of 1948, approximately 31,000 acres, comprising the area served by the Packwood Canal Company were annexed to the District. A U.S. Bureau of Reclamation contract was signed in 1950 providing an annual supply of 30,000 acre-feet of Class 1 water, and up to 141,000 acre-feet of Class 2 water from the Friant-Kern Canal. The District and the Kaweah Delta Water Conservation District have coordinated efforts to enhance the recharge of groundwater within the Kaweah Basin. During high flow times KDWCD may use the recharge basins with the District for recharge purposes. Further, KDWCD has historically provided for a financial incentive program through which the District sustains the level of groundwater recharge from supply sources into the District. This historical program was recently reinstated by both districts in lieu of the District's plans to concrete-line this canal to conserve the surface water. TID is a member of the Mid Kaweah GSA.