

# Water Wrights

## Westlands Water District Grower's Meeting March 17, 2020

By Don A. Wright

The Westlands Water District held its annual Water Users' Workshop by teleconference at 1:30pm on Tuesday, March 17, 2020. The March board meeting was cancelled. General Manager **Tom Birmingham** welcomed everyone and got right down to business. This meeting was scheduled to be held at the WWD Five Points, California offices but the Coronavirus has saved a lot of folks the extra time and gas expense. There was a pdf outline available online at <https://wwd.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/water-user-workshop.pdf>

Birmingham said WWD has joined with the feds in supporting the biological opinions now under suit by Governor **Gavin Newsom's** administration. He also announced the finalization of the new water contract with the Bureau resulting from the WIIN Act. Good for them.



### 2020 Water Supply

WWD's **Russ Freeman** gave an update on the 2020 water supply outlook. Freeman said Westlands received a 15 percent allocation for its Central Valley Project supplies. from the US Bureau of Reclamation. February was one of the driest months on record. The March storms that have left the Sierra Nevada blanketed with snow was a good help but there will have to be more storms before it's over.

Freeman thinks the allocation may increase to 20-30 percent in April. The State Water Project has allocated 15 percent also. He gave the estimated water year 2020-2021 total as 846,000 a/f with 450,000 a/f of that from pumped groundwater unless the surface supply allocations and transfers increase to offset the pumping. There is a supplemental water supply available for WWD growers. The cost per acre foot is between \$600-\$700. Applications are due by May 1<sup>st</sup>. There are 265,000 a/f available – it is hoped. Much of that will be from north of Delta Transfers.

### Budget

**Bobbie Ormonde** runs the financial matters at WWD. She said the 2020-2021 budget is \$203,256,000 at a 15 percent allocation. She said the cost of an acre foot with every middleman, woman and child paid will be \$278.50. The M&I rate will be \$546.69 per acre foot.

### SGMA

WWD Engineer **Kitty Campbell** is the engineer in charge of SGMA program compliance. She said last year's average depth to groundwater was reduced by 51 feet. It was a wet year with better supplies. There could be some lost ground this year. The expected drawdown will be 40 feet on

average. Campbell was pleased to tell listeners the Westlands GSP was completed and turned in by deadline. The initial annual GSA report will be due to DWR at the end of this month. Under the GSP the goal is for meters district wide by 2022; the same year groundwater allocations will begin. Beginning in 2022 the pumping allocation will be 1.3 a/f per acre. It will then be reduced in 2023 by 0.1 a/f per acre annually until reaching 0.6 a/f per acre in 2030.

Next Campbell spoke about the Irrigated Lands Program. She said there were three reports due by March 1, 2020.

- Farm Evaluation (High Vulnerability Areas Only)
- Nitrogen Summary Report: Submit Actuals for
- 2019 Crop Year Data
- Irrigation and Nitrogen Management Plan: 2020; Pre-Season Planning Completed and certified (Keep on Farm).

Campbell also said 91 percent of Coalition members have completed the March requirements.

Birmingham then addressed the coronavirus situation and said WWD will abide by all the necessary guidelines to keep its employees and clients safe and healthy.

#### **Q & A**

The meeting then opened for questions. It got a little more difficult to follow as there were no notes supplied by the district since they couldn't know what questions would be asked. I know I heard **Kevin Assemi** identified as a question asker. But I know him and recognized his name and that wasn't true for the others. I didn't catch Assemi's question and with the answer out of context I didn't fully catch it either. So, instead of making things up this would be a good time to end this report of the meeting.

#### **Considerations**

I've sat through a few teleconferences and they are not my preferred way of communicating. Of gathering information. After all water is secondary to what topic we're really addressing – which is humans. People. Our friends, neighbors and fellow citizens. We all need water and we all need the food farmers grow so these are not small stories. In fact I can't think of a more important consideration during this time of virus than a healthy food supply. Nobody on earth does that better than a California farmer. It's good to see the look on their face when they talk.

I believe God knows the number of our days; it's not a productive time for me to worry about things outside of my control. I've tried it and it gets in the way of living. I'm not immune from fear but I want to be sure that isn't the motivating factor in decision making. I have two ladies I love living with me; my wife and my mother. They are both in vulnerable categories for the virus. I'll do my best to avoid exposing them.

Besides I've been grocery shopping twice since this weekend and the market seems to be the one business that is busy. The shelves are bare of paper products and bottled water which is more disconcerting to me than the virus. Why paper and water? Well, as far as I know there is no substitute for bath tissue and I can kind of get that. Water, water is the one thing we can't do without. I have a good well at my house and Fresno and Clovis' water quality and supply infrastructure is good. We're not running out of water. We're not having to boil our water. But it is the one thing we have to have. Water is second only to air. As long as we can breathe and have water we can go for a while without food and shelter provided we have clothing and don't have to run around naked above the snow line in the winter or down in Death Valley during the summer. I guess if I lived in town and things got medieval I'd want some portable, potable water.

So, as long as the phones work and the elected meet it is our intention to continue providing our readers with information and our clients with marketing opportunities. And we'll save money on gas and eat less fast food.

I don't know when the Westlands meeting ended I had a call come in and lost the connection trying to swap calls back and forth. My final point on remote meetings is the districts need to provide easy access to the audio and or visuals and call in information. Remote attendees need to be aware unless they are talking to mute their phones so you disrupt things with background noise. I'm not going to say for certain it was me but I'm pretty sure it was me who didn't mute on teleconference when I was driving which was unthoughtful of me.

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### **Westlands Water District**

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**Board:** Don Peracchi-President, Dan Errotabere – Vice President, Jim Anderson, William Bourdeau, Frank Coelho Jr., Larry Enos, Ryan Ferguson, Stan Nunn & Todd Neves.

**Staff:** Tom Birmingham-General Manager, Jon Rubin-Attorney, Jose Gutierrez-COO, Russ Freeman-Deputy GM Resources, Diana Giraldo-Public Affairs Representative, Shelly Ostrowski-Associate GM Water Policy, Kitty Campbell-Supervisor of Resources, Bobbie Ormonde-VP of Finance & Administrative Affairs

**About:** Without irrigation, farming in the Westlands area of California would be limited and ineffectual. The history of Westlands is one of continual adaptation, careful water stewardship and advanced technology. By maintaining a fierce commitment to sustainability, the Westlands' comprehensive water supply system continues to adapt, educate, and surpass conservation goals. Throughout its history, Westlands Water District has demonstrated a lasting dedication to water conservation and recognized that the long-term survival of its farms depends on the effective management of California's precious water resources. From [www.wwd.ca.gov](http://www.wwd.ca.gov)