

# Water Wrights

## San Luis Delta Mendota Water Authority June 4, 2020

By Don A. Wright

**T**he **San Luis Delta Mendota Water Authority** held its board of directors meeting on Thursday, June 4, 2020 by teleconference. May it go well without technical glitches. Just before the meeting started Valley Water (Santa Clara Valley Water District) Director **John Varela** was telling **SLDMWA** CEO **Federico Barajas** that **Rick Callendar** is the new CEO. He's a good guy and good for Valley Water.

SLDM Chair **Cannon Michael** called the meeting to order at 9:33am and Attorney **Becca Ackroyd** called roll and there was a quorum. The agenda was deemed in good order with no need for adjusting. There was a public comment quiet time with no one speaking up. The consent calendar was next. Nothing was pulled and the calendar approved. There was a mention on an energy item that will be addressed later in the meeting. There was a roll call vote. Looking at the agenda there are two action items so the meeting won't be bogged down in long roll calls.



The Delta Mendota Canal is smaller than I thought

### Action Items

The first action item was to authorize spending \$50,000 on a Delta Channel Maintenance Planning. There are many problems but aquatic weeds are choking the Delta in many places. One such place is the fish screens at the federal Jones Pumping Plant. This is seed money and as diverse groups as the Delta Water Master and Westlands Water District. Both South Delta Water Agency and Central Delta Water Agency are considering join up. The goal is to get \$250,000 to come up with a doable plan in cleaning up the channels. The participants indicate how important this is. The board voted to approve the expenditure.

The next action item was to consider a joint resolution honoring the contributions of **Sig Sanchez**. External Affairs **J. Scott Petersen** said the City of Gilroy, Santa Clara County, Valley Water and SLDM has an incredible history of volunteer and elected service. Mr. Sanchez turned 100 years old recently and the board was very happy to recognize this man. Varela commented Sanchez was also a farmer.

### Reports

Barajas began with a talk about raising the B.F. Sisk Dam on San Luis Reservoir. Barajas introduced a man named **Chris**, I think his last name might be **Park**, to update the board on what's happening with this project.

Park popped up some slides on the screen to show how the cost allocation could be divided and how the extra water could be allocated as well. The design is coming along to the point of showing how the portions of Highway 152 impacted by rising water levels in San Luis Reservoir can have cost estimates attached. M&I, agriculture and refuge water supply economic models are being developed. The Administrative Draft EIR/SEIS has received comments and a public scoping meeting was held last month. There is a June 15<sup>th</sup> deadline to get comments in. The field surveys for endangered species, water quality and historical preservation have been completed and under review by the US Bureau of Reclamation. There were no questions. Assistant Honcho **Pablo Arroyave** said State Parks has also had a look around and they're fine with it.

Engineer **Joe McGahan** said the Mud Slough agreements for the Grasslands Bypass have allowed using the San Luis Drain until 2029. There has been a restoration project on Mud Slough going on for decades. Ackroyd said there should be an action item next month to declare SLDM as the lead agency for the process.

**Frances Mizuno** reported on energy transmission. The pumps use a lot of power. She introduced **Richard Sanchez** from the Bureau who said a 1,200 megawatts line will run from SLR to the Jones Pumps and it's about paying for the transmission line to PG&E. The annual costs were running into several million dollars. Folks started looking around for alternatives. Duke Energy is partnering but needs more subscribers for this to pencil out. Sanchez said he believes Duke's prices are preventing more participation. They're kind of high. USBR Commissioner Brenda Burman is involved and aware of the situation. She's in support of stimulus funding going to this project. Sanchez said it doesn't look like Duke is willing to work with smaller margins so there could be a Bureau participation in conjunction with low interest WAPA loans. But this money is for private business and not the Bureau. Also if there is a low water year the Bureau doesn't make the money from sales to carry the loan. Sanchez said there is an option for SLDM to act as a third party to help pay off the loan on drier years. The Bureau asked what level of support is the SLDM or its members willing to give. For instance, what if the Bureau is denied the loan?

Mizuno said 80 percent of the current costs of transmission is paid by SLDM O&M. Sanchez said without a 3<sup>rd</sup> party investor every bit of extra capacity income would go to the Bureau. But if Duke can't market it how does the Bureau do so? Mizuno said there just happens to be an investor for 600mgw power capacity. There are solar developers willing to participate that could lower the Bureau's \$150 million cost share of the \$300 million total. At this point things got a little more technical than I could keep up with. My sense is Duke is out and there are affordable ways to make this work with the Bureau. But SLDM will have to step up as the third party. They decided to put together three options involving the Bureau and SLDM.

Petersen and former congressman **Dennis Cardoza** gave the state and federal affairs roundup. Petersen began saying President Trump is expected to get ready for more stimulus but doesn't expect anything before the July recess. The Democrats want proxy votes in the House but the Republicans are suing to block this as it has never happened before and could well be full of mischief. There are water wildlife laws coming up for committee this month. The Senate will start working on a bill to clean up overdue national park repairs. In California news a budget was proposed by the legislature wants to spend more than Governor **Gavin Newsom** by getting more federal funds. These guys, they want to fight with the feds over any little to big thing they can but sure want federal tax money. There is a proposed update to the Delta Plan that needs to be reviewed by water agencies.

Petersen continued on state matters saying there has been a \$7 billion bond in the state senate to pay for fires and other things. The state senate and the assembly aren't on the same page with stimulus

budgets. The transparency of state legislative matters are moving through the budget process and coming out cloudy on the other side.

Cardoza said Congress is working diligently on Zoom calls up to 12-hours a day. He said if you have a relationship already like a lobbyist you can get to the congress. Not so much the average person and he said there is a rebellion about to take place in Sacramento because so much is being done behind closed doors the lobbyists can't get information. Here's a surprise the teachers' union doesn't want any cuts in its trough and that may send things back to bonds for funding other needs. Cardoza also said some of the Democrat congressmen are reaching out to Governor Newsom to get the biops lawsuit resolved sooner than later. He said his firm just hired a guy who used to work with fly ins and now gets virtual meetings with elected officials. He also said there are members of the ag committee concerned with food supply due to closed borders and market signals. A bill was introduced to help processors transition from restaurant to consumer direct marketing. Water allocations and SGMA challenges has been put forth in relation to the nation's food supply when briefing congress. That sounds good.

Barajas gave his report saying SLDM is continuing with its communications plan by incorporating better meetings with general managers. He asked Mizuno to talk about the joint funding with Contra Costa County for more storage and it has been extended. She expects another amendment to extend it into the end of next year. The virus has really knocked that program to its knees schedule wise. She said Ackroyd is working on a JPA for the Los Banos expansion. **Chris White** Ex O of Ex Con reported the Del Puerto Dam project said a lot of stuff real quick but it boiled down to making its feasibility report valid and on schedule. There is a Del Puerto Canyon website with a video on dam safety. There wasn't any update on the Pacheco Reservoir.

Barajas said the SLDM Sacramento office space may be moving from downtown. It is also working with a different realtor about staying downtown. He said if any of the member agencies have a need for Sacramento office space they could be roommates. Right now they share space with what sounded like the chronic, which is slang for good marijuana, or so I've been told. Turns out they are sharing space with a law firm named Kronic. The lawyers are moving their offices leaving things in the air.

Arroyave reported on O&M matters it sounded to me like the Bureau is being above and beyond with pump repair needs in Tracy.

Water operations and forecasts were given by Tom Boardman. He said there are three units today with a fourth coming online tomorrow. Starting to get some decent pumping. He said things got held up last month by the court fight over the new biops. Salt is there but not yet hampering things. He sees a decent June



pumping output this year. Upstream at Shasta doesn't have as much cold water as the Bureau would like but there should be enough to keep things cooler at the October reserves. Folsom is gaining from snow melt but isn't expected to fill by 200,000 a/f. Folsom can be used to help with Delta flows which will help export pumping. He said the B120 report is a monthly update of snow if I understood correctly and used for supply estimates and other metrics. The year type for Shasta is critical and CVP allocations remain at 75 percent. The B120 report has a great deal of impact on the amount of storage anticipated.

**Brandon Souza** with the California Farm Water Coalition reported there is some media content out there that doesn't center on COVID-19 and riots. There are getting hits on food and ag. Director **Bill Diedrich** reported the ACWA summer meeting will be virtual. **Austin Ewell** reported on the San Joaquin Valley Water Blueprint adventures. He said having a collaborative effort for both short and long term planning. The membership has been growing and even Delta and north of Delta interests have joined. The USBR and DWR as well as input from NGOs like Self Help and the Leadership Counsel are contributing to defining the problem and finding solutions. The PPIC in many ways kicked things off with its report on what SGMA could do to the Central Valley. After that the Blueprint had an economic impact assessment prepared by Dr. **David Sunding** that is available. The report looks at what will happen if a million acres of production is removed from the economic activity of California. It isn't pretty and hits the disadvantaged communities extra hard. This has been brought to the attention of the governor directly. A drinking water study with Friant Water Authority, the Leadership Counsel and Fresno State University amongst others is seeing what can be done for communities along the Friant Kern Canal. A similar effort is being planned for the Delta Mendota Canal. This is big and I need to a report on this to you my readers. Finding this cooperation between the parties involved could be a real milestone for this Valley's water needs.

Board member reports were next and they were a taciturn bunch this morning. No board reports and no public comments. The meeting then went into closed session.

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**SAN LUIS & DELTA-MENDOTA WATER AUTHORITY** was established in January of 1992 and consists of approximately 2,100,000 acres of 29 federal and exchange water service contractors within the western San Joaquin Valley, San Benito and Santa Clara counties. The governing body of the Authority consists of a 19-member Board of Directors classified into five divisions with directors selected from within each division. The main conveyance is the Delta-Mendota Canal that delivers approximately 3,000,000-acre feet of water within the Authority service area. Of this amount, 2,500,000-acre feet are delivered to highly productive agricultural lands, 150,000 to 200,000-acre feet for municipal and industrial uses, and between 250,000 to 300,000 acre-feet are delivered to wildlife refuges for habitat enhancement and restoration.

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