

# Water Wrights

## San Luis Delta Mendota Water Authority July 9, 2020

By Don A. Wright

**T**he **San Luis Delta Mendota Water Authority** held its board of directors meeting on Thursday, July 9, 2020 remotely from its Los Banos headquarters. At 9:30am Director and Vice Chair **William Bourdeau** called the meeting to order. Evidently Chairman **Cannon Michael** wasn't available. Attorney **Becca Akroyd** told roll and there was a quorum. Throughout the meeting Akroyd also called the role for voice votes.

This is something that has to be done in the new remote meeting structure. There was a change on an agenda item, the date was off, no public comment and the consent calendar was approved.

### Action Items

The first action item was presented by consulting engineer **Joe McGahan**. The Grassland Basin Drainage Management Steering Committee recommended **SLDMWA** act as lead agency for the Mud Slough Restoration Project. The project helps to mitigate for the unfinished San Luis Drain the government left hanging. This project helps to



keep the wildlife habitat in good shape. I don't know why the GBD isn't the lead agency. Director **Tom Birmingham** wondered the same thing. He said it is rational for SLDM to act in this capacity but wondered if there were any other agencies also and the consensus was to go with SLDM. The rest of the board agreed and the item passed.

The SLDM Finance & Admin Committee recommended adopting a reporting and anti-retaliation policy (whistle blower). COO **Pablo Arroyave** said this has been planned for a while. Akroyd explained further the need for this policy inclusion to show the Authority's commitment to honesty. The HR director will determine if a complaint falls under the policy's responsibility. The changes will allow for an appeal subject to board approval and investigation. Birmingham asked if a false disclosure can be unfounded but not necessarily false. He suggested some word smithing to clarify this distinction. The board went along with this and approved the item. In case you didn't know Birmingham is also an attorney.

**J. Scott Petersen** made the next presentation saying the it would be good to adopt a couple of resolutions that will help insure an equitable spreading of costs on an Integrated Regional Water Management Plan 2019 Westside-San Joaquin/City of Huron special project agreement. Huron (and I've been criticized in the past for saying so by some of the more politically correct sophisticatos)

Huron isn't the most charming city in California and did receive disadvantaged communities funding. This resolution helps those funds to be channeled to where they can do the most good. Both the resolutions passed.

Petersen presented the next item that would have the Authority kick in about \$109,000 from the technical budget to help jointly fund the State Water Contractors' science studies. It breaks down to \$75k for Delta smelt, \$30k for CAMT Tech support and \$4k for smelt predictive modeling development. Sorry I don't recall what CAMT stands for and I couldn't speak up so we'll find out and let you know one of these days. In the meantime the board felt it was a good investment and approved the expenditure.

On a topic directly related to spending money, SLDM also kicked in \$15,000 to the San Joaquin Valley Water Blueprint's education fund. This money goes to helping inform folks of the severe economic impact of SGMA on the Valley. It's a serious matter and the board, in my opinion rightly put their money where their mouth is. The item was approved.

## Report Items

Executive Director and all around nice guy **Federico Barajas** started his report saying the BF Sisk Dam raising project should have a good chunk of the necessary documents will be completed this summer. He turned the presentation over to **Chris Park** who is shepherding this effort. Park reported the succession of administrative drafts have now been refined to a degree that is finding some tractions with the parties involved. The presentation got a bit technical but if I understood correctly the benefits of raising the dam would allow operations that could yield an additional 310,000 a/f of Central Valley Project storage at San Luis Reservoir.

Park said modifications to State Route 152 has a feasibility design report almost finished. The economic impacts of having a better Municipal & Industrial, agricultural and wildlife habitat benefits are being studied. This will include the benefits of a better 152 roadway and should be finished this month. The third EIR draft has been submitted last night and he's awaiting comments. He said get 'em in quick as the turnaround on delivering this document to the US Bureau of Reclamation is short. Park's next slide was titled "ESA Consultation/CWA and NHPA Permitting". I really dislike when folks assume everyone knows what initials and acronyms mean.

## A Shocking Amount of Power

However, if anyone knows what it means it would be the next presenter, **Frances Mizuno**. She reported \$299 million will be the cost for needed updates to the San Luis Transmission lines. When the CVP was first constructed designers knew the amount of electrical power required to make the project operable was a big number. They built in a power grid to go with the water conveyance portion and it's time to upgrade. I think it was 1962 when President John Kennedy dedicated the opening of the San Luis Delta Mendota unit of the CVP so the taxpayers got their money's worth out of the old system. It's time to augment and how to pay for it was Mizuno's presentation. There are loans and bonds available for consideration. There were also opportunities for private investors to get a piece of the action. This was also a technical presentation full of comparable debt service. She said the private investor option appears to be the best. This was an informational item so no vote was given or needed. The board's consensus was for staff to follow its recommendation and gave weight to the recommended course of funding.

The next item on Barajas' report was more information on paying for electrical updates. The Jones Pumping Plant has huge pumps and the motors need rewinding now and then. The plant was designed to operate for a continuous period of time and shut down. Those days are gone and with all the regulation since construction these pumps are being turned on and off a lot. They are big, like more

than 20 feet in diameter, I may be underestimating. The torque to start them up is massive and the shafts and bearings are wearing out faster now that operations aren't following design specs. This also causes the motors to need rewinding and converting to a variable speed that will allow the pumps to operate a slower RPMs.

Mizuno explained there are six units at the Jones Plant and two have been updated. One is currently under conversion. There needs to be funding by November for the USBR to fund two of the remaining units. This is a \$37 million job. There is a WIFIA loan, again I don't know what that stands for but SLDM retained consultants to help them with this. She expects it will cost more than \$700,000 to apply for the loan since for some reason I don't understand the EPA gets a cut. One of these consultants, Lora Carpenter lead the board through what seemed like a really long explanation of options that compared how to structure the deal. It's a necessary due diligence when you're dealing in the millions and millions of dollars range but it didn't keep my attention.

### **Legal Mischief**

Petersen gave the legislation report saying there is a list of federal actions worth looking into that included ESA listings and federal agency cooperation. US Fish & Wildlife's Capo de Capo **Aurelia Skipwith** will be touring the Valley soon. Petersen said there is some federal funding for water infrastructure in the House but it is a mixed bag in some ways. It changes how funding can be applied for and spent. There was a bill for clean drinking water SLDM supported but didn't make it through the democrat controlled House.

On the state side there is a budget proposal that will cut state worker pay if hoped for additional federal funds. Other things that could happen is changing bookkeeping methods to get more money for the state to spend. The State Board has been writing nastygrams to the Bureau about water temperature management on the Sacramento River. Petersen said he'll keep the board in the loop. He also said the state assembly and senate probably won't be coming back to work when planned due to the virus itis. Director Bill Diedrich asked what's happening with the governor's Water Resiliency Portfolio. Petersen said there have been other shinny objects commanding more attention.

Arroyave reported there are five units pumping at Jones and the fish screen has had a lot of debris building up. It is a mess there. Weeds and flotsam have been clogging things up there. Dwarf hippopotami have been suggested as a method of hyacinth removal.

### **Water Operations**

**Tom Boardman** gave his water operations and forecast saying now that there are five pumps running it is hoped capacity will be maintained between now and August. Oroville is making lower than usual releases so the state Banks Plant is low as well. He said the state side of San Luis Reservoir is pretty good. There is three million acre feet in Shasta Lake and that gives some wiggle room for the Bureau's temperature compliance and should buck up the State Board. Folsom releases have helped keep Delta flows up. Boardman said a late season snowpack on the American River watershed was very helpful. The fed side of SLR is losing more than 1,000 a/f per day but if Jones can keep five units running demand should be met to such an extent draw down on SLR will be well within safe levels for this year. But if there isn't a good early winter storm season that will of course drop SLR for its spring filling. The big deal for this side of the system is plenty of inflow to Shasta. I was surprised to hear Shasta is more of a rainfall watershed than a snowpack.

### **Committees & Outside Agency Reports**

Committees reports were next and Birmingham said the Water Resources Committees recommendations were voted on today and they heard Barajas, Arroyave and Petersen's reports. The Finance & Admin met but there wasn't anything big that happened. Ex Con Executive Director and O&M Tech Committee Chair **Chris White** reported there was no meeting and won't be until October.

Byron Bethany GM **Rick Gilmore** reported the State and Federal Contractors Water Agency is still on life support. Director **Daniel Errotabere** reported the Family Farm Alliance is moving right along doing work on behalf of the righteous. **Mike Wade** reported for the California Farm Water Coalition's Cultivate California website is kicking butt and has been a good investment. The ACWA report was given by Diedrich who had a background that made him look like he was flying around the Sierra Nevada. He said the ACWA conference will be virtual this time and the Ag Committee will feature Dr. **David Sunding** speaking about the SGMA economic impact report he wrote for the SJV Water Blueprint. Valley Water's **John Valero** reported the ACWA Region Five that goes from Santa Barbara to San Francisco will have a virtual panel he's moderating about safe drinking water. There was no update from the SJV Water Blueprint.

There were no reports from any of the board members. Akroyd asked Director **Dan McCurdy** to identify himself before going to closed session. I don't know if he did or not but the meeting then went into closed session and that was that.

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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.

**Board** - Chairman: Cannon Michael,

**Staff** - Executive Director: Federico Barajas, Assistant Executive Director: Pablo Arroyave, Attorney: Becca Ackroyd.

Email: [youtellus@sldmwa.org](mailto:youtellus@sldmwa.org) 209/826-9696

P.O. Box 2157 Los Banos, CA. 93635