

Water Wrights

Westlands Water District August 18, 2020

By Don A. Wright

The Westlands Water District held its board of directors meeting remotely from its Fresno headquarters on Tuesday, August 18, 2020. The meeting was hosted by BlueJeans.com. The time to start was 1:00pm but there was some problem with audio and such. At 1:05 Chairman **Daniel Errotabere** called the meeting to order with a preface that the heat in California may cause a rolling power blackout. If that happens the meeting could be continued by telephone conference. The first matter was approving the minutes.

GM Report

WWD General Manager **Tom Birmingham's** GM report was next. It started with Deputy GM **Russ Freeman** started the report with a water report saying the district may reschedule 10 percent of its allocation under US Bureau of Reclamation rules. There is 280,000 a/f remaining to be distributed and staff will keep an eye on San Luis Reservoir. The 280,000 a/f much more than 10 percent.

Tom Boardman reported the federal Jones Plant is pumping but this will be reduced for about six hours to accommodate the strain on the electrical grid. He said the state Banks Plant isn't pumping as much. Boardman said there is 2.2 million a/f of carryover at Shasta which is better than the Bureau expected. That's a better indication of Shasta being able to fill next year. He said upstream storage indicates good pumping from the Delta into the fall. An early nut harvest reduced demands and row crop harvest coming up should also soon lower demands when that starts. He expects SLR to fill up on the federal side by mid-February or early March. That's good news.

Errotabere asked if there could be a fall allocation to help recharge. Boardman said he has his doubts about the Bureau not wanting to do so. He said there has been the very rare late allocation in the past. Birmingham said last month WWD staff went to the Bureau and asked for more allocation and was told no. The USBR is concerned any further allocation could cause a severe low point situation at SLR.

Next **Shelly Ostrowski** said not much is happening in Washington DC due to the Democrat and Republican conventions happening. She's still looking at infrastructure legislation pending. On the state side she said there is a bill we heard about at yesterday's Friant Ex Committee setting aside 30 percent of the state's land and water. It's still fuzzy but WWD's new lobbying firm Mercury, is on it. Following that **Kat Boren** reported on WWD outreach.



Directors and Other's Reports

Director **Todd Neves** said ACWA Region Six and Seven will be developing a program that may include the San Joaquin Valley Water Blueprint.

Director **Frank Coelho** reported the budget committee believes the budget is in good shape. Coelho also said due to the Big Marxist Virus meter manufacturing has slowed down and the target date for next March may be pushed back.

Director **Larry Enos** said there was nothing to report from personnel.

Neves presented the board with two resolutions for USBR Water Smart Grant applications. District engineer **Kitty Campbell** went into greater detail. There are financial and legal obligations that go with accepting a grant so the board's buy in is needed. She said there are two grants: drought resiliency and the WWD has a recharge program that will facilitate injection recharge. The other grant is for water and energy efficiency and that is installing 900 meters to monitor groundwater. She said getting the grant could lower some of the landowners' costs. A board resolution is needed to apply for the grants. Due to some IRWMP grant funding the Broadview WD area will receive some of the fed funding for recharge. It was a bit confusing. Broadview was retired due to poor water quality and putting good water into that aquifer seemed strange. Campbell said there is a lateral near the well site to convey the water but Birmingham had to step in and state the upcoming CEQA will address water quality and the staff fully expects the extracted water will be usable. The board approved the resolutions.

Neves presented a request to extend the agreement between the San Luis Delta Mendota Water Authority and the Los Vaqueros Reservoir Expansion Project. This is an activity agreement under SLDMWA. WWD is a member of the SLDMWA and this item will keep WWD in the activity agreement. Freeman explained WWD will be on the bill for up to \$153,000 to stay in play. Of course the goal is for the Los Vaqueros expansion will benefit SLDMWA members. The board agreed. **Bobbie Ormonde** polled the board. In addition to polling boards Ormonde is WWD's Vice President of Finance & Administrative Affairs.

SGMA

Campbell next spoke about the groundwater situation in Westlands. She estimated 114,000 a/f has been pumped so far this year. She put up several graphs but the one showing the relationship between groundwater depth averages and pumping from 1950 to present showed moderate but steady improvement, if I read the graph correctly. Another graph showed the locations of wells that pump from above and below the Corcoran clay layer. Two maps showed the intensity of pumping by location within WWD from above and below the Corcoran layer. A map of subsidence impacts was also presented. In addition to land sinking there are conditions within the district that shows elastic subsidence in many areas with an emphasis on the Delta Mendota Canal path. Subsidence has been slowed or stopped and in the case of elasticity even reversed. This data came from annual DWR measurements ground truth by monitoring and satellite data.

Campbell also spoke about SGMA saying there will be a GSA meetings coming up where the GSP will be reviewed. The good news is grant money to help implement the GSP will be coming available at \$5 million chunks.

Admin & Finance

Enos chairs the Finance & Administration Committee. He said WWD's Sacramento offices in the downtown/capitol location will have to change. WWD has been room mates with a law firm that's moving and the firm offered to take WWD with them. But there is an office at the Senator Hotel that has many other Valley water agencies with offices located there. The size and cost is comparable to the

old offices and the physical location will help WWD staff maintain better personal contact with the movers and shakers. The board was good with this.

Ormonde said there needs to be a budget change to meet debt service on the 2020/2021 San Luis Unit/WWD Financing Authority on bonds. The board was ok with this as well. The board also approved the paying of the district's bills. The investment and finance report was next. Ormonde gave the report and the board was cool with it. Not cool on it, cool with it and approved.

The next item dealt with what is a controversial issue for some in WWD; proxy votes. In California a water district votes by acreage. If we were neighbors in a WD and I had 50 acres and you had 173 you'd get 123 more votes than me. However, I could give you a proxy for my votes and you would have 227 votes. Some of the constituents haven't found the procedure completely understandable. My man, attorney **Jon Ruben** said there was supposed to be a resolution at this meeting but it isn't ready yet. He said next month would be soon enough to implement the changes but if necessary there could be a special meeting to deal with the resolution. Much to my surprise not a single objection or even a comment was made. Perhaps this is a good omen for district/client relations. Good for them.

My other man, COO **Jose Gutierrez** was appointed by the board to represent at the SLDMWA Delta Habitat, Conservation & Conveyance Program Steer Committee. That was unanimous. This committee deals with the Delta Tunnel project.

The last open session item was public comment. There were none and the board went to closed session to discuss anticipated litigation. One item deals with a farm suing WWD and one of the directors has an interest in this farm. So he'll sit out discussions.

Then all the Westlands Staff and Board gathered together waving while the closing music from the Beverly Hillbillies played until the web conference screen went blank. And that was that. I'll note the meeting was just about an hour long. I don't recall Westlands ever having that short of a meeting, at least not in my experience. So, good for them.

DISCLAIMER OF RESPONSIBILITY; Waterwrights strives to provide his clients with the most complete, up-to-date, and accurate information available. Nevertheless, Waterwrights does not serve as a guarantor of the accuracy or completeness of the information provided, and specifically disclaims any and all responsibility for information that is not accurate, up-to-date, or complete. Waterwrights' clients therefore rely on the accuracy, completeness and timeliness of information from Waterwrights entirely at their own risk. The opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and do not represent any advertisers or third parties.



ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. Copyright © 2020 by Don A. Wright

Westlands Water District

3130 N. Fresno Street, Fresno CA 93703 Phone:559/224-1523

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