

Water Wrights

Westlands Water District October 20, 2020

By Don A. Wright

The Westlands Water District held its board of directors meeting on Tuesday, October 20, 2020 remotely from its Fresno headquarters by Zoom. I've come to believe that Zoom is the best remote meeting program I've so far encountered. I like how you can send up messages to the entire group or individuals. I usually need to have more windows open than I imagine most folks do. I need to watch the Zoom portion, the agenda/packet and my Word program so I can type. While I'm commenting on remote meetings I'd like to get your opinion. Remote meetings present new opportunities and challenges. Certainly we can all save money on gas and auto expenses. But it is important to start on time, provide an agenda and board packet online in PDF and it is much easier to

start the public portion on time if closed session is held after the public portion. I know there are situations that require meeting earlier – sometime big on the agenda depends on a decision made in closed session or scheduling conflicts demand an earlier closed session – but these are public meetings of public agencies and therefore should be held with the convenience of the public taken into consideration. Now before some wise guy or gal starts scheduling meetings in the evening when more people can theoretically attend know that I realize there are concessions for the fact these meetings are public but even public agencies have to operate like a business and that means business hours. To management and board members of all the entities covered thank you for taking these suggestions into consideration. Remember I charge for advice and give suggestions for free.



The Actual Meeting Starts

WWD Chairman **Daniel Errotabere** called the meeting to order at 1:00pm. VP of Finance & Administrative Affairs **Bobbie Ormonde** called roll and there was a quorum with only Director William Bourdeau missing. General Manager **Tom Birmingham** said there were no corrections or additions to the agenda.

GM Report

Birmingham started his GM report with having Deputy GM Resource **Russ Freeman** give his report. Freeman gave an update of the amounts of water recorded in many different forms. WWD has about 710,000 a/f of expected supplies available this year. That was an estimate but based on past experience. There could even be 45,000 a/f of carryover. That class of water has to be used first or lost should San Luis Reservoir fill.

Tom Boardman gave his report saying exports this time of the year are driven more by possible storm water than habitat or temperature control. The federal Jones Pumping Plant has slowed to three pumps and may drop down to two unless some storms come through. He said Lake Shasta storage is on average for this time of year, as is Lake Folsom. The San Luis Reservoir was filling up but is now starting to drawdown. Wildlife refuges' demand has kept the levels at SLR static. He said SLR should fill by next April.

Eric Johnson asked what kind of allocations are expected and Boardman gave three projections based on the hydrological year. Dry means 10 percent, mostly likely 50-60 percent and of course the sky's the limit is there is a wet year.

Birmingham reported WWD has filed a motion to intervene on a PG&E rate requests. He said if PG&E gets the rate it wants it could cost the district and its growers big time. He and others were able to give State Senator Melissa Hurtado a tour of WWD. He thanked Sal Parra Jr. and Burford Ranch for their help. Associate GM Water Policy **Shelley Ostrowski** said a bunch of stuff about gearing up for legislation for next year. But the thing I heard was she's going on maternity leave.* Good for her, what a blessing. **Kat Boren** reported the PR team has been working on several projects including revamping the website and an election video for the upcoming district elections.

Committee Matters

Director **Todd Neves** said WWD Director **Ryan Ferguson** will be an ACWA director for Region Six. Good for him. Neves is the current Region Six board member and wants to step down to allow him more time to work on SGMA and other responsibilities. Neves said Ferguson is an excellent candidate to make ACWA involvement valuable. The board passed a resolution putting Ferguson in place. When the vote was taken Ferguson asked if he would be able to vote – he was the only candidate and it felt like he was being sincerely humble. Birmingham said he was legally able to vote but some may question why he's taking ACWA on his plate. Birmingham isn't known for quips but that one was pretty good.

Freeman reported on the groundwater pumping and conveyance projects that needs a Warren Act contract to move up to 30,000 a/f of SLR water to underground storage. This project received a neg dec.

Supervisor of Resources **Kiti Campbell** told the board WWD wants to transfer 30 a/f to Panoche WD by a grower with land in both districts. Director **Frank Coelho Jr.** commented having a water transfer out of the district during a 20 percent year. He asked would this even be considered if this would even be allowed if this was a 1,000 a/f. Campbell said the grower has stated it doesn't pump groundwater from WWD and district policy states transfers come before the board. Birmingham said historically this exact type of transfer has happened before many times and is allowed if it is a neighboring district with a landowner with property in both districts. Coelho still didn't warm up to the situation. Neves said the Water Policy Committee didn't take all of this in consideration and said Coelho was making a valid point. Coelho said the board should deny the request and allow water to leave the district. Johnson commented saying there has been a great deal of water from San Luis WD and Panoche WD than has ever left WWD. He said he doesn't have a stake in this but it might be a good thing to have some flexibility for transfers with neighbors. That was a good point but SGMA looms large. As Birmingham pointed out Coelho made a motion to deny the request and Director **Larry Enos** seconded the motion. Bourdeau showed up and voted no. This transfer won't happen.

Campbell showed a table of groundwater pumping amounts in comparison to South of Delta deliveries and Sierra precipitation. WWD is able to read more than 90 percent of its wells. She presented maps showing the different aquifers in the district and how much is being pumped from each. There was no comments or questions.

SGMA

Campbell reported on SGMA matters for WWD. She said the technical and advisory committees will not meet this month but will meet next month. **Amanda Monaco** of the Leadership Council asked what other GSP projects are either being implemented or on deck. Campbell said there are some but I didn't understand which ones she was referring to. That was it for SGMA at this month's meeting.

Finance Report

Ormonde gave the board a request for \$400,000. The money will go to piping a ditch. This was a budget augmentation request. COO **Jose Gutierrez** said he believes the cost increase was due to material costs increasing. The board agreed to spend the extra money.

Next Ormonde explained the district does a mid-year budget evaluation and things either go up or down. In this case some of the revenue sources earned more than expected and that has an impact on the O&M – Ormonde pointed out O&M specifically. There is also a \$1.9 million bill to the San Luis Delta Mendota Water Authority and the extra money could be applied there. Some of the savings from the budget review came from much lower travel expenses due to the China Virus. The board approved the review and moving money around from account to account to take care of needs.

Someone named **Patty Schifferle** asked about a \$15 million land sale but this wasn't part of the agenda and didn't go anywhere. Enos asked about the cost of discing some of the district's land and said he'd rather lease the land for a dollar than spend anymore district money. Ormonde gave the board an accounts payable update. The board paid its bills. She also gave an investment report that was approved. Schifferle asked again how the sale was recorded. Ormonde said the sales haven't closed but they would be revenue to the district.

Public Comment

The last item before closed session was public comment. **Jon Reiter** asked about the abstention on the transfer of water to Panoche. He said he believes in the past a director would give a reason. He asked if this is law or policy. Birmingham said he wasn't aware of any law requiring a director to give a reason if there isn't a conflict of interest.

Ross Franson said he sat through the voting workshop and wants to be sure all the needed information has been made available. Birmingham said Ormonde and the rest of the staff are working diligently to make sure all the landowners' ballots are counted as valid. Ormonde said she spoke with Franson earlier and has some further information. I believe it was Director **Stan Nunn** who abstained earlier and he said he opted out of casting a vote because he has a relative involved in the requested transaction.

Well, it was another exciting water meeting and things went into closed session.

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.

*Why am I always the last to know?



ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. Copyright © 2020 by WaterWrights.net/DAW

Westlands Water District

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

Board: Daniel Errotabere-President, Frank Coelho Jr. – Vice President, Jim Anderson, William Bourdeau, Don Peracchi, 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, Kiti 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