

Water Wrights

Fresno Irrigation District November 17, 2020

By Don A. Wright

The **Fresno Irrigation District** held its board of directors meeting at its Fresno headquarters on Tuesday, November 17, 2020 remotely by GoToMeetings. There was no messing around at 4:00pm sharp Chairman **Ryan Jacobsen** called the meeting to order. We saluted the flag. **Kassy Chauhan** gave everyone some meeting etiquette and procedures and called roll. There was a quorum and more than enough staff to start the meeting. It looked like about 14 members of the public were also attending. Dr. **Don Portz** of the US Bureau of Reclamation San Joaquin River salmon restoration and both the General Manager **Alan Hoffman** and Chair of the Fresno Metropolitan Flood Control District **Buzz**

Burleson were listening in.

Jacobsen said there were some changes to the agenda; Items 11 j. g. i. and h. He said there was a big tarp hanging on the wall and it looked like it needed to be pulled. General Manager **Bill Stretch** said it was the new logo. It's an oval with Fresno Irrigation District Est. 1920 written in black on a gold ribbon surrounding a drawing of a check structure with water running through it. Stretch said if anyone has ever been in a logo design committee will know why he's happy to have completed this task. A lot of ideas come together vying for supremacy.



Pals

Next Burleson spoke saying there is a special relationship between Met Flood and FID. He said the cooperation between the agencies has been much appreciated and presented the board with a resolution memorializing these sentiments. Stretch said he's always liked working with Met Flood but has seen things improve. Hoffman said he was pleased to see Stretch take the reins at FID. Hoffman is retiring at the end of the year and said he's most likely being replaced from within. Good for Met Flood. He also said he's going to look up former FID GM **Gary Serrato** and play some golf.

A Churchillian Figure

Also in the room was a legend on so many levels from water to journalism and historian, **Randel J. McFarland**. Stretch said McFarland gave a talk to the FID staff giving a complete history of FID. When I owned my newspaper back in the 1990s I printed at the Selma Enterprise, McFarland's publication. I really had no idea what I was doing. Yet I was treated like the most important client to

ever walk through the door. I've seen McFarland and former San Luis Delta Mendota Water Authority GM and historian **Dan Nelson** give a presentation on the history of water in the San Joaquin Valley. It was held at the Fresno Museum of Art and I strongly advocate that be repeated and recorded with all the production values money can buy. McFarland's knowledge of water is encyclopedic. He knows the history of the Kings River and said Fresno ID has been one of the biggest players from the beginning and the results are still apart of the operations.

Chauhan and Stretch worked with McFarland on the district's centennial celebration and praised him for his help and kindness. McFarland spoke and reassured us all he isn't retiring. He wrote a centennial story about FID and I look forward to a signed copy. He received a resolution from the board and the thanks of all.

Expensive Salmon

Next Dr. Portz, USBR Program Manager of the San Joaquin River Restoration Program spoke about the program. Stretch had heard him speak at a workshop and invited him to speak to the board. He said San Joaquin River is about as long as the canals starting at Friant. He said construction on Friant Dam started in 1939 to store water for agriculture and provide flood control. The reservoir is only 500,000 a/f of storage in Millerton Lake so there is no true cold water pool like in the massive Lake Shasta. At one time the San Joaquin River had the largest salmon migration in the state. When Friant was completed in 1942 the river's down stream reach dried up and here were no more salmon runs to Friant. In 1988 the Natural Resource Defense Council and other enviros sued. After 20-years of litigation the SJR Restoration settlement was reached. The settlement calls for enough water to support natural salmon habitat from Friant to the confluence of the Merced River. The other goal (called a co-equal goal) was to continue supplying water to contractors with the least disruption. The idea is to improve spawning grounds and flood plains. There is fall run and spring run salmon. Since 2014 juvenile salmon have been released from a hatchery at Friant. In 2019 the first documented fish to have completed a life-cycle from Friant to the Pacific Ocean and back was discovered. Portz said there is reason to be cautiously optimistic. Other fish have returned to the Friant site and bred, with offspring doing the same so there has been some success.

Other problems are still waiting to be overcome. There is seepage from salmon flows downstream that can ruin farmland. That's not good in itself but losing water is bad because fish flows could be captured and sent back in the Patterson ID area new Newman if the water isn't lost. There is a dam on the SJR called Sack Dam. A fish, well it wouldn't be a ladder, a fish structure will be installed to allow in and out migrating fish to bypass the dam. Levees and flood plains have to be built. Portz showed a video of what has happened on the SJR. It showed salmon swimming along the SJR.

Director **George Porter** asked Portz where the money comes from. Portz said some of it comes from the CVPIA, some from Congress and some from a surcharge on Friant contractors. Director **Jerry Prieto** asked about a photo showing a much cleaner channel that he's ever seen. He also asked what the cost per fish returned is. Portz danced and said he thinks each fish is priceless and as more fish return the costs will go down. I have heard from reliable sources it's more than \$25 million per fish. That's how we spend tax money in California. The costs of the High Speed Rail to no where could pay for this project, fix the Friant Kern Canal and do who knows how much other benefits. Prieto also asked if other fish have benefited and Portz said there has been better trout fishing. Portz said the City of Mendota was very happy to have water in the SJR during the summer. Bass fishermen are divided on the new situation because some fishing holes won't be accessible. Jacobsen asked for GPS locations of the good trout fishing.

We Meet Again

Jacobsen went back to the agenda's regular order. Stretch said getting future meetings on the calendar with a schedule that would be more conducive to getting a better meeting without bashing the staff and board with extra busy days and extra-long meetings that drag into the night. The suggestion was to move it to Thursday and start at 3pm, an hour earlier. Some directors wanted 1:30 and other wanted to keep it at 4pm. But 3pm was the most popular compromise but with the caveat it be revisited after a few months. That passed but won't take place until January.

Public presentations were next but there were none. There were no conflicts and the consent calendar was passed without any items pulled.

Finances

Controller **DeAnn Hailey** gave her report saying October was quiet and that's normal. October isn't a big event month. She reported the accounting software was migrated to the new computer system so updates can be completed. The current financial statements were approved and Hailey presented the 2021 Budget for board approval. She had some interesting things to say about what happens depending on the water year. The base to work from is the normal water year. The board accepted the budget and was then asked to approve the placement of \$500,000 into a trust account for retirement and insurance. I'm no expert on this subject but it didn't sound like FID was in a City of Stockton type pension crisis. It sounded to me like the district has been responsible and the board must of agreed because they approved. The last item in the financial report was an answer from last month. Hailey told the board the cost for consultants will be \$206,000 over the 2020 budget. The consultant expense went to engineering firms like Provost & Pritchard for studies and of course the centennial costs were a onetime thing. The Rose Consulting Firm for public relations was also a first time cost and now the routine has been established. Stretch spoke up and said there was an underestimation and he took responsibility. Refreshing and not common outside of the water special district. Director **Greg Beberian** speaking as a member of the finance committee said the increased costs and reduced revenue the district has been experience has been a challenge.

Water Report

Assistant Manager **Adam Claes** started the water report saying Pine Flat storage is at 57 percent of normal at 206,000 a/f. There was a storm that went through about a week ago and dropped a quarter inch at Pine Flat. The area is slight ahead in precipitation but not by much. Fresno ID hasn't been receiving Kings River flows and has about 32,000 a/f in storage. Millerton Lake is 85 percent of normal.

Claes said the Creek Fire burned 380,000 acres and is the largest single source fire in state's history. It's now pretty much smoldering and about to go out. The vegetation is so altered from the fire the ASO wants to establish a new baseline. The Fresno area is below average in rainfall, some parts of Northern California are getting enough moisture to exit the drought category. The La Nina is intensifying and it should remain strong through May. DWR is predicting an 85 percent precipitation this water year and much better than the 54 percent of last year. The predictions are improving.

Engineering

FID Engineer **Lawrence Kimura** gave his report listing the progress of various projects taking place in the district. He said it's busy out there. NEPA was completed on the Wagner Basin last month and re-bids have come in for further consideration and possible award. He said High Speed Rail is still fussing over right of way before continuing over FID canals. The urban trails agreement with City of Clovis is unchanged.

Kimura reported groundwater levels have been taken district wide and the October data has been posted on the FID website. Staff will present the board with a more detailed report either next

month or at January's meeting. He also showed the board progress on the district's recharge basins. Check structures and turnouts along the canals are underway.

Next Kimura asked the board to approve a resolution for the USBR Water Management Plan. These have to be updated every five years. He said the initial draft was presented to the Bureau a year ago and it took almost that long to get comments back. The changes have been made and all that is needed is a resolution from the board to give the Bureau and post the plan online for a 30-day comment period. Prieto said he's looked over the plan and thought Kimura and his staff did a great job. The board passed the needed resolution.

The bid mentioned earlier was up next Kimura said the bids for the Wagner Basin came in about \$125,000 less the second time. Cal Construction came in at a bit more than \$850,000 and that was the winning bid. The board agreed and awarded the bid.

Claes gave the board a construction and maintenance update with photos that showed graders and slope machines cleaning up canals. He mentioned one the slopers was made in the 1970s and may soon need replacing. There was a photo of a very large backhoe setting a bull dozer in the bottom of a canal that looked pretty cool. He also showed the board a breakdown of how the man hours are being spent with pipeline repair requiring 20 percent of total man hours.

SGMA

Chauhan said the Kings Sub Basin is trying to secure Prop 68 funding. The GSAs are working together to get \$5 million as soon as it can. She said fall data collection is wrapping and being sent to Provost & Pritchard. There are seven GSAs in the Kings Sub Basin working together.

One of the Sky Tem helicopters will be flying around the northeast portion of the North Kings GSA near the foothills. There will be great data provided on where the fractured rock aquifer meets the alluvial aquifer and where any recharge possibilities may lie. And new well review policy with the county is being finetuned and outreach is ongoing to drillers and others impacted.

Other Stuff

FID has an old building on its campus full of files and data. Chauhan said scanning and organizing those files is ongoing and a renewable energy project is going forward as well. She said the new electronic packets are available. It takes getting used to. Prieto said he looked it over and couldn't find the Board Effects agenda. That's a new data management system for documents. He said he's all for it as a recent meeting's packet was delivered by the US Mail a month late. The US Mail moves in mysterious ways. There are also domestic well water quality and a nitrate control program deadlines coming up. The Kings Water Alliance is being formed to help deal with the Kings Management Zone for nitrates.

External Affairs

There isn't much happening legislative wise but the San Joaquin Valley Water Blueprint is keeping its momentum going. There is a meeting this week on November 19th. Chauhan said she attended the California Water Commission October 21st meeting where the Temperance Flat Reservoir Project was discussed. Tal Eslick is now the spokesman for the Temp Flat Authority.

Chauhan said public relations has heated up in the past month with a tabloid featuring the centennial information being sent by mail and those should be showing up soon. The Fall 2020 Newsletter FID Water Ways is going out. There is a press release going out tomorrow for the centennial notice. Social media is growing and stakeholder recognition is going well. FID has gone out to other agencies to give presentations on FID's history. Most of the agencies visited gave FID resolutions. Fresno County also recognized FID as only the 9th centennial business in the County. Good for them. There are only a few weeks of the centennial left. And although the China Virus* shut down much of the celebrations there were still some great events taking place. FID gave seven

employee appreciation celebrations with red carpet award ceremonies. They had to do seven of them because of safety spacing. Stretch said it would have been efficient to have one big bunch. But the smaller numbers were more intimate and gave a more personalized touch. He thanked Chauhan on **Summer Singh** and others for their creative input. Jacobsen attended one of the events and said it was a good launch for year 101.

GM Report

Stretch said today's Kings River Water Association meeting took less than an hour, a record. Today must have been a day for records because Westlands Water District was only about an hour. Stocking fish on the Kings River attracted a lot of fishermen. Most of the rest will be in closed session.

Stretch said the Friant reports are getting bulky and he's coming up with another way to get this information to the board. He said the Friant Water Authority didn't have an executive committee this month and is now holding a retreat on the coast. There is no phone line to the retreat so we'll have to wait until later to find out what happens. Stretch graciously referred to WaterWrights.net as a good source of information about some of the opinions represented regarding funding.

Directors Reports

The Director's reports were brief. **Chris Woolf** told a story about the traveling college football band but I couldn't quite hear the story. I wish I could have because it sounded like the kind story I would have enjoyed. Everyone wished all a blessed Thanksgiving and the meeting went into closed session at 6:50pm. It was a little long but well-paced and interesting. And that was that.

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Fresno Irrigation District - The Fresno Irrigation District is located at 2907 So. Maple Avenue, Fresno CA 93725 phone 559/233-7161 and meets at 4:00pm on the third Tuesday of the month at district headquarters. FID is part of the North Kings GSA DWR # 5-022.08

Board

Ryan Jacobsen – President, Jerry Prieto - Vice President, Greg Beberian, Christopher Woolf & George Porter

Staff

Bill Stretch: General Manager

Adam Claes – Assistant General Manager – Operations

September Singh – Assistant General Manager – Administration

Laurence Kimura – Chief Engineer (you had him nailed down good)

Jeff Boswell – In-house Legal Counsel

Jim Irwin – Water Master

David Burrows – Water Master In Training

Michael Prestridge – Superintendent of Construction & Maintenance

DeAnn Hailey – Controller

Kassy Chauhan – Special Projects Manager/North Kings GSA Executive Officer