

Water Wrights

Triangle T Water District November 3, 2020

By Don A. Wright

The **Triangle T Water District** held its board of directors meeting remotely by Zoom on Monday November 3, 2020. Chairman **Lucas Avila** called the meeting to order at 10:00am. The TTWD GSA was held first and that went fast, like six minutes. But things were taken care of. At this time I'm not real sure about Tri T's structure. Both **Sarah Woolf** and **Chase Hurley** seem to be the general managers. Woolf said there have been informative talks with Madera County on how to deal with subsidence.

Budget

Hurley went over the district's budget and it has a \$3 million budget. There was a \$550,000 water rights application fee sent to the state. There was also more than \$1 million spent on importing water. There are recharge ponds being installed and the idea is to penetrate the shallow and hopefully thin clay layer that is believed to overlie a big sandy spot.

Pipelines

The next item was a construction contract for a pipeline. The Wine Group wants to share costs with Tri T for a pipeline extension contract to go to McElvany Inc. for \$601,805. There is a twist to this as The Wine Group isn't in Tri T but could be annexed in the future. This does raise the question about paying for infrastructure outside of the district.

Jason Pucheu spoke for Prudential Asset Management saying there have been 15-properties placed under its control. He said The Wine Group is one such company and has another company named Asellus, perhaps a holding company, I couldn't tell. Asellus is the major tenant and has concerns about groundwater pumping in the area. The question of what wells are shallow and what are below the Corcoran clay layer isn't completely answered yet. As these and other questions are answered a better understanding about annexing to Tri T will be achieved.

Hurley said the \$600k price would be split 50/50 between the property owners and Tri T with title belonging to Tri T whether or not an annexation takes place. The property owners would have access to the water of course but would pay for wheeling fees and annual costs such as O&M and power to Tri T. Director **Molly Thurman** asked about who pays the maintenance on the pipeline. Hurley said Tri T would be responsible for repairs but would be charging O&M. If a tractor plowed through the pipe the landowner would be responsible for reimbursing Tri T for repair costs. He also said 90 percent of the proposed pipeline will be in Tri T district.



Hurley said the matter of having infrastructure outside the district needs to be vetted. One consideration is Asellus will pay the district in five easy, annual installments for the construction of the pipeline. Hurley said another way to go is for Asellus to pay the district to purchase water instead of the pipeline. That didn't make sense to me and Director **Dirk Vlot** wanted to know how that works. Asellus gets a pipeline to deliver water without paying for the pipeline. Woolf said the water will help prevent further pumping. Thurman said it doesn't make her feel good to pay for a pipeline benefiting property outside the district.

Someone, **Carl Evers III** perhaps, asked what's the rush if Asellus doesn't even know if it wants to be a part of the district. Hurley said you can look at it as a way to reduce deep pumping in the Red Top area. If you wait to do the pipeline later construction costs could go up. Woolf added she believes the two properties north of the By Pass, Asellus and Haynes will want to join in the future. Vlot said ask anyone farming if having multiple water sources has value. He said \$300,000 is a small price for such value.

Pucheu responded saying a portion of the water is in the Chowchilla Water District with options there for supply. They are still doing due diligence on the property. He said he has no problem waiting if that is the way things go. He still wants to know the well situation on the property and some further questions about water supply from Ash Slough. Evers offered to speak to Pucheu on the side about how John Hancock Insurance has done its due diligence for property in the area. Pucheu agreed and thanked him.

Hurley said there is no overriding issue with putting this on hold until there is more certainty. Thurman agreed with Hurley as did Vlot. Hurley said there could be similar situations dealing with building infrastructure outside the district and this is a good way to develop some criteria. Avila said the consensus is to give things more time. Thurman thanked Hurley and Pucheu for being willing to talk with the district and not to take this delay as a negative. She said Tri T is interested in furthering the best groundwater situation in the sub basin. Vlot said he's a big fan and he was speaking for the entire board, of bringing outside water into the area.

Water Operations

Hurley said it looks like the October Exchange Contractors deliveries are about 9,000 acre feet. This year's total is likely to be 11,000 a/f of imported water which is on target for the projections. Director **Jose Ochoa** said he believes all the purchased water should be delivered by Thanksgiving. Hurley said he could be contacted by Madera Irrigation District and Chowchilla WD about some possible water at San Luis Reservoir. Woolf said there is 3,300 a/f of water that could come through Santa Clara Valley WD and be delivered through Central California ID. More about that in closed session.

Water Budgets

Woolf put up a spread sheet showing water demand by crop of the properties showing interest in being annexed to Tri T. There are 14 properties totaling 10,543 acres that would bring a 36,066 a/f demand that would in turn cause a 23,375 a/f negative water balance. Spread out by acreage it would create a .92 a/f deficit. This could require bringing in an additional 25,000 a/f annually. Hurley said the existing infrastructure couldn't handle that amount but the cost per a/f could triple the more than \$100 per a/f current cost. Hurley emphasized this is a worst case scenario and steps are being taken to reduce the subsidence. Vlot said to keep in mind this is a starting point. He said he's seen Hancock do some spectacular work improving the situation and he is going for more shallow wells. Woolf added some of these properties are already either on the Tri T infrastructure or very near.

Vlot asked about bringing in land from the Madera County GSA sub basin and that impact on the GSA. Woolf said it will require an operating agreement with the Madera Sub Basin. Sub Basin

boundaries won't be changed. Avila said a better knowledge of what deep and shallow wells assets are in the area will help. Hurley said there has been a lot of work to gather this information and it is close to completion. Hurley said he thinks the annexation process – at least the data portion is close to wrapping up. Woolf said she believes staff can put together an analysis showing the benefits and impacts on the dollar values. Avila liked that idea. He said Tri T is absorbing some hits for the benefit of the area and needs to see some pluses. Woolf said she'll get that info to the board at the next meeting.

Water Rights

Woolf said the State Water Resources Control Board sent a letter to the engineering firm of Provost & Pritchard last August about Tri T's application for appropriate water rights in cooperation with Aliso WD. Problem was the P&P engineer who received the letter wasn't working on the project and Tri T wasn't notified by the State Board about the letter being sent. The next thing you know Tri T is getting pestered by the State Board to respond to the letter. The good news is this was all straightened out in time to meet deadlines and is moving forward.

Hurley said the State Board has agreed to allow for adjudication on the Fresno River. He said the Fresno River does enter Tri T territory and it will act as an interested party but has no claim to the water. He said the landowners fighting this are looking at a decade of legal maneuvering.

The meeting then went into closed session for negotiations on the Santa Clara Valley WD water offer. So it was 11:24 am and that was that.

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Triangle T Water District

TTWD is a recently formed water district representing more than 10,000 acres of land in the southern portion of the Red Top area in the San Joaquin Valley near the Merced/Madera County line. Until a relatively few years ago this area was mostly range land belonging to the Triangle T Ranch. The conversion to permanent crops has placed a strain on the groundwater from pumping and necessitated the formation of the water district. Although the district doesn't have secure surface supplies from the Central Valley Project or State Water Project it is actively implementing programs and infrastructure to secure surface supplies and it looks to be conducting an all hands on deck approach to reducing subsidence and other harm to the aquifer. TTWD is part of the Triangle T Water District GSA – DWR # 5-022.5
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