



SSJID Spring 2016 Irrigation Newsletter

March 22, 2016

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“I don’t believe in pessimism. If something doesn’t come up the way you want, forge ahead. If you think it’s going to rain, it will.”

-Clint Eastwood

2016 Water Season Start Set for March 25

Spring Runoff and Instream Flow Requirements Key to Supply Available for District Growers

With a relatively good dose of late winter and early spring snow and rain, the SSJID board confirmed at the March 22 meeting that the 2016 water season will start on Friday, March 25. Division Managers will begin notifying farmers of the first water delivery immediately.

District farmers are asked to ensure that all field valves are closed, including drain valves. Farmers who use field drains are required to notify their division manager before opening their valves to drain into our system. (See page 3 for water department contact numbers.) Once water deliveries begin, please coordinate with your division manager regarding any repairs to your valves, boxes, etc. If you are aware of any damaged vents, please contact Ron Strmiska Jr., field/maintenance supervisor, at 209-993-9769 as soon as possible.

2016 OPERATIONS

A public hearing was held at the District on March 8, during which the District’s board voted to adopt a 40” allotment for its agricultural growers, and to set a 10-day rotation schedule. The board may consider adjusting the inch limit depending upon ongoing water conditions. The cities that receive water supplies from the District’s Water Treatment Plant will have their volumes reduced by 16% from 2013 water deliveries. The board also directed staff to operate Woodward Reservoir storage similar to last year in an effort to maximize storage while reducing evaporation as much as possible.

The board also adopted rules and provisions for 2016 drought response programs. The following programs are being continued from 2015 :

⇒ Water transfers from a private well to any location in the District, regardless of which lateral used, or whether they are upstream or downstream from the well, as long as the District can make use of the water.

- ⇒ Master Accounts for allotments that enable growers to combine the water allotments of all the fields they farm and decide where to use the water.
- ⇒ Transfers of allotments among parcels so farmers can increase their allotment by making a transfer agreement with another farmer.
- ⇒ Daily updates of growers’ water use history on the District’s website once an online account has been established.
- ⇒ Provision of a consumption review service to address concerns about the accuracy of the record of the growers’ consumption.

These drought response programs will be very similar to those put in place last year, and details of these programs can be found on our website: www.ssjid.com, or by contacting your division manager and/or Julie Vrieling, the district’s water conservation coordinator at 249-4675.

STORAGE IN NEW MELONES

A wetter winter has put us in better standing related to water content in the Sierra snowpack than has been the case the last four years. However, spring runoff is the key indicator of how much water from will be available for District growers and cities that rely upon us considering recent warm periods that can reduce snowpack and resulting runoff.

Operational storage in New Melones (NM) continues to be the biggest impediment to meeting all of the water rights and instream requirements on the Stanislaus River. Four years of drought, coupled with significant and impractical in-stream releases on the river, has resulted in record low storage.

Currently, NM is approximately 24% full and 39% of the 15-year average. District model estimates of existing

hydrology and upstream reservoir operations suggest that we could expect nearly 930,000 AF of inflow into NM, especially considering the additional rainfall and snow the Central Sierras have received since March 1. With this inflow, SSJID and Oakdale Irrigation District would be entitled to a full 600,000 AF for 2016 under our agreement between the Districts and the Bureau of Reclamation.

However, at the current level of storage, and with large regulatory instream flow requirements in the spring, there is an expectation that even with near average hydrology, NM storage may not refill significantly by the end of the season. This would result in storage dipping dangerously low again, causing further difficulty in 2017 for the Districts to deliver sufficient water supplies under certain scenarios, even if the Districts were able to access conservation account water.

REGULATORY ISSUES

Last year, the State Water Resources Control Board (SWB) enforced curtailments on pre-1914 water rights holders in the San Joaquin and Sacramento River Systems. Given the recent rainfall and current snowpack, the SWB has indicated that curtailments may not be issued in 2016 on the Stanislaus River. If they are issued elsewhere around the state, the process and metrics used to issue the curtailments last year may be different this year, with curtailments varying geographically and situationally. Because of inflow and storage considerations unique to 2016, Reclamation will be submitting for SWB approval a temporary urgency change petition asking for relaxation of water quality standards to stretch and coordinate available water supplies for the year.

Recognition of Non-Native Predation Effects on Salmon Population in the Stanislaus River Gaining Ground

Both the State of California and United States government invest a tremendous amount of money and regulatory focus on protecting endangered salmon and steelhead species, but other than additional flow requirements, they have done little to address other stressors that affect salmon populations, such as predation by introduced, non-native fish species.

The scientific understanding of the role predator fish have in low salmon-survival numbers in California rivers and waterways has advanced tremendously since the 1990s through a number of studies by federal agencies and independent researchers. However, fishery management practices have not kept pace, and outdated legislation and regulations actively work against efforts to restore salmon and steelhead populations in the state.

Recent testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives by one of the leading experts on fish predation not only provided scientific background on how "pulse flows" do not increase salmon numbers in the river but also asked for support to not

only continue studies on this matter, but more importantly for regulatory and legislative changes to actively implement predator suppression programs in vulnerable California waterways. Such efforts are already under way in Oregon and Washington, and are much needed in California.

Politically, there is growing recognition of the problem of predator fish. In 2015, the House of Representatives passed an amendment by Rep. Jeff Denham to focus on the predation problem, and Sen. Dianne Feinstein's recently introduced water bill has specific language to require the removal of predator fish from the Stanislaus River to study the effects such actions would have on salmon numbers.

As growers who rely on adequate supplies of water from



the Stanislaus River for irrigation purposes, educating yourself and expressing your support of these and similar measures to your legislators would not only benefit endangered salmon, but also help us promote

effective ecological water management that benefits the environment, the economy, and the people of California.

At Oakdale and South San Joaquin Irrigation Districts, we are intensely focused on the health of our watershed and waterways. We have worked extensively with Doug Demko, president of FISHBIO, a fisheries consulting firm and one of the leading experts on non-native fish predation. His February 10, 2016 testimony before the House Subcommittee on Water, Power, and Oceans is powerful evidence that predation is the number one concern regarding

salmon population and shows that the research we have invested in for the benefit of not only our growers, but also the environmental health of the Stanislaus River, is critical to developing effective solutions to this problem. Links to videos of Demko's testimony, as well as Rep. Denham's and Sen. Feinstein's legislation are below.

We thank you in advance for your continued attention and support toward implementation of programs such as these that will provide benefits for agriculture and environment alike. We also recently sent letters with information similar to that contained in this article to government officials, local water agencies and state regulatory agencies asking for their attention to this issue as well.

Rep. Denham's Amendment to H.R. 2578 and Sen. Feinstein's Comprehensive Water Bill: (Secs. 201-204 focus on predator fish) can be found at: <http://www.savethestan.org/predation-legislation/>

Doug Demko's Feb. 10, 2016 Testimony Highlights can be found at: <http://www.savethestan.org/doug-demko-testimony/>

Pressurized Irrigation Service Fee Increase Includes Funds for Capital Asset Replacements

After holding a public hearing on February 23, the SSJID board voted to increase the fee for water delivered by our pressurized system because revenue from the previous charges was not recovering the electricity costs of the system and included no funding for future replacement of the system's capital assets. The hearing provided an opportunity for the board to hear from customers who benefit from the system before they deliberated their decision regarding the proposed fee increase, and a protest vote was tallied. Out of 117 parcels within the system, only 11 parcels protested the fee increase.

Recognizing that after a fee increase failed after a majority protest last winter, this year the

board held two ad-hoc committee meetings involving a group of landowners served by the system to help formulate a new rate design that would hopefully be supported by a consensus of system users. Later, the board invited all users of the system to a meeting to facilitate an exchange of information and feedback between ratepayers and directors in an effort to be as transparent as possible with everyone who would be affected by the proposal.

The new fee is no longer a tiered system as it was previously. It is now \$44 an acre foot, \$10 of which is for replacement of capital assets for the system as they wear out or fail, and \$34 of which is to cover the costs of electricity to

operate the system. The \$34 electricity component will adjust annually for inflation or deflation of electric costs incurred by the system after 2016. The previous calendar

year's actual cost of electricity used for pressurization is designated as the inflation index to determine the electric component of the following year's pressurization rate.



2016 Water Department Contact Information

Division 1	Joe Hasten Anthony Podesto	652-9793	Division 6	Michael Donahue Jimmy Thomas	652-2409
Division 2	Andrew McDonald Bob Anderson	652-9784	Division 4-6 Relief	Jeff Hammond Mark Schneringer	
Division 3	Keith Obrochta Randy Sprinkle	652-9775	Operations/ Water Supervisor	Joe Catanzarite	495-8927
Division 1-3 Relief	Jim Schaad Charlie Couto		Assistant Water Supervisor	Nick Fereria	993-9213
Division 4	Collin Hodge Rob Shipman	652-7025	Field Maintenance Superintendent		993-9769
Division 5	Joe Lourenco Jason Wirstlin	652-3427	24 Hour Emergency # (209)249-4632		

Court Upholds San Joaquin LAFCO Ruling for SSJID Retail Electric Plan

In December 2014, the San Joaquin Local Agency Formation Commission (SJLAFCO) approved South San Joaquin Irrigation District's (SSJID) application to provide retail electric service. After its request for reconsideration of that approval was denied in February, 2015, PG&E filed a lawsuit challenging SJLAFCO's decision. In a March 7, 2016 Order, the San Joaquin County Superior Court Judge hearing PG&E's challenge, Hon. Carter Holly, rejected PG&E's argument that SJLAFCO erred in approving SSJID's application. Judge Holly found that SJLAFCO correctly decided that SSJID would have sufficient revenues to provide retail electric service and was not required to find that SSJID could provide service at a 15% discount.

In his 26 page Order, Judge Holly stated: *"As the Court reads the Application, the 15% reduction is an objective and benefit of the proposal...SJLAFCO was required to determine whether SSJID has sufficient revenues to provide retail electric services to customers in its territory. Substantial evidence was submitted to support SJLAFCO's determination that SSJID has the financial capability to provide retail electric service."*

In a separate lengthy Order, Judge Holly also rejected PG&E's constitutional challenges to Condition No. 2 of SJLAFCO's approval of SSJID's application, which obligates SSJID to make payments in

lieu of taxes and fees to San Joaquin County and the Cities of Manteca, Escalon and Ripon. SSJID proposed in its application that it would pay those agencies for what they would otherwise lose if SSJID acquires PG&E's electric assets in order to provide retail electric service. In his ruling against PG&E's constitutional challenge to Condition No. 2, Judge Holly found that, "PG&E has not established that the Condition No. 2 is unconstitutional on its face." He also found that PG&E's as applied constitutional challenges could not be adjudicated now because "SSJID has not decided, committed to, or otherwise implemented any of the several options available to it, and other aspects of the payments require negotiations which have not yet occurred." Judge Holly found that until the actual facts surrounding the Condition No. 2 payments are known, PG&E was improperly asking the Court to speculate about their constitutionality.

In his remarks on the significance of the Court's March 7 rulings, SSJID General Manager Peter Rietkerk stated that although the court ruled that SJLAFCO was not required to consider whether SSJID could provide service at a 15% discount, the District still intends to do so. "In fact, a condition of SJLAFCO's approval requires SSJID's Board of Directors to determine that the District can provide service at a 15% discount before it

completes the purchase of PG&E's distribution system," said Rietkerk. "SSJID remains committed to providing a 15% rate reduction, and the District would continue to evaluate its options as it moves forward. The ultimate discount we'll be able to provide depends on the costs to acquire PG&E's system in our service area," he explained. "Once we know that figure, we'll conduct another fiscal analysis and hold a public hearing. We know it's important to deliver a 15% discount."

SSJID expects in the near future to make an offer to PG&E to purchase its distribution assets. If SSJID is unable to purchase the distribution system through negotiation, a public hearing would be scheduled before the District's Board of Directors at which it would decide whether to authorize the filing of an eminent domain complaint to acquire PG&E's assets. SSJID will continue to provide our growers with updates as the process moves forward and we appreciate your continued support!



Providing Water Since 1909

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Manteca, CA 95336

Mailing Address:
P.O. Box 747
Ripon, CA 95366

Phone: (209) 249-4600
Fax: (209) 249-4684

SSJID Leadership

Key staff and elected officials include:

President **Robert Holmes**
Vice President **Dale Kuil**
Director **John Holbrook**
Director **Dave Kamper**
Director **Ralph Roos**

General Manager:
Peter Rietkerk

Assistant General Manager:
Bere Lindley

General Counsel:
Steve Emrick

The SSJID Board meets at 9:00 AM every second and fourth Tuesday of the month. Meetings are open to the public and are held at the SSJID Headquarters located at 11011 East Highway 120 in Manteca. If you would like more information, please visit our website at www.ssjid.com, where you can view upcoming agendas, approved Board minutes, and a map of District divisions.

Maintenance Season Readies District System for 2016



Photo Left: Crews from Teichert Construction laid nearly 2,500 feet of pipe for the new Evans Estate subdivision in southern Manteca.

Photo Below: District crews applying shotcrete to the T_b line.



Photo Left: District crews building float box on the H line to control water levels passing through.

