



SBCWD UPDATE SPRING-SUMMER 2011

SAN BENITO COUNTY WATER DISTRICT

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Managing California's Water?

The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta is a critical resource. Almost half of the water used for California's agriculture comes from rivers that once flowed to the Delta and more than half of Californians rely on water conveyed through the Delta for at least some of their water supply.

The Delta also provides habitat for 700 native plant and animal species. This important region is now in a serious, long-term crisis. Major threats include rapidly declining populations of threatened and endangered fish; increasing risk of levee failure due to earthquakes and decades of neglect; rising seas and changes in frequency and intensity of floods and droughts due to climate changes; and worsening water quality.

Reductions in the amount of Delta water available to the agricultural sector have become regular occurrences over the last few years. Despite record production in counties throughout the Central Valley in 2007, recent water shortages resulting from the drought and legally-mandated Delta pumping restrictions have resulted in total farm losses that some estimate to be as high as \$245 million as of mid-summer 2008.

A report released by the Public Policy Institute of

California, "Managing California's Water," does not suggest deep water conservation on farms. It also does not presume that all of the state's native fishes can be saved or that all of its aquatic habitats should be restored to some pre-settlement ideal.

Rather, the report's theme is "reconciliation," which the authors define as managing California's water resources to benefit today's environment and economy.



"We have to keep in mind, we don't have a natural system left in California," said Peter Moyle, one of the co-authors and a fisheries professor at the University of California at Davis. "We need to build a system that works as well for people as it does for fish."

The authors propose a shift from managing water and habitats for the needs of a single endangered species to methods that preserve whole ecosystems. They go so far as to suggest this may mean sacrificing some

species for a greater good.

The 500-page report focuses on statewide water problems, but the eight authors acknowledge that the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta remains at the heart of many issues.

In an earlier report by the institute, many of the same authors backed a canal or tunnel to divert some of the Sacramento River around the Delta. They do so again here, citing it as the best alternative to halting all delta water diversions, which they view as unrealistic because 25 million Californians rely on that water.

They propose cutting urban water demand statewide by 30 percent, which could allow total delta water diversions to be cut about 10 percent, further helping the estuary.

Yet they propose no conservation goal for agriculture, which uses about 80 percent of all the state's water.

Farm conservation, they assert, is ineffective in reducing net water demand because the saved water ends up getting used to grow more crops elsewhere.

Real agricultural water savings only comes from fallowing farmland, they state, which should be determined by market forces.

These claims were disputed by Peter Gleick, president of

the Pacific Institute, a nonprofit think tank that researches water and other environmental issues.

A 30 percent urban conservation goal will do little to cut delta water diversions, he said, because urban water use is relatively small.

And in previous studies, Gleick has identified millions of acre-feet in potential water savings on farms, whether by switching from flood to drip irrigation, or by changing the delivery practices of irrigation agencies.

"A vast amount of water could be saved by smart agricultural efficiency practices," Gleick said. "The argument that agriculture can't save water pretends there's no unproductive evaporation, and that there's no water lost to groundwater that we can't recover."

Many of the report's conclusions echo prior studies that call for government reform. For instance, it recommends transferring the State Water Project, which manages delta diversion pumps and the California Aqueduct, from the state Department of Water Resources to an independent system operator. This would function much like the agency that oversees the state electric grid. [\(Continued page 2\)](#)

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The state's regional water quality control boards would become regional stewardship authorities, with expanded power over issues now centralized in Sacramento: flood management, water quality and supply, and restoration.

The State Water Resources Control Board would gain full regulatory power over groundwater, which is not even monitored comprehensively today.

The study can be found online at www.ppic.org

Paicines Canal Improvement

The District operates the Paicines Canal and Reservoir, which was built in 1913. In 1957, the financing for building and operating Hernandez Dam, and the reconstruction of the Paicines Canal and Diversion works were approved. The canal is over 8 miles long and was designed to transport approximately 95-100 acre-feet of water per day. This equates to roughly 32,600,000 gallons of water per day.

The District holds water rights licenses from the State of California for Hernandez Dam and Reservoir, Paicines Dam and Reservoir, and Dos Picachos Creek. These water rights permit the diversion and storage of surface water for percolation into the ground for later recovery and use. Water is released for percolation through the streambed at the San Benito River, Tres Pinos Creek, and a natural drainage adjacent to Dos Picachos Creek.

In the summer of 2009 the Paicines Canal was only able to transport 25 acre-feet per day due to debris and silt. The canal was surveyed, cleaned and reshaped by November of that year. Then in January 2010 the District added 30 tons of a Bentonite to the canal. Bentonite is a naturally occurring clay that is non-toxic and is able to absorb multiple times its own mass in water when submerged. Water loss is reduced by lining the canal with this substance. After this procedure was done the canal was able to transport water at the rate it was originally intended (95-100 acre-feet per day).

In January of this year another 600 feet of canal was cleaned out and another 6 tons of Bentonite was added to the canal lining to prevent seepage. The canal is now operating at peak performance.

San Benito County Water District—Educational Outreach

The District, with the assistance of the Water Resources Association of San Benito County and the Bureau of Reclamation, sponsored a series of water efficiency classes over the winter. The classes were well attended and received high marks from the attendees. The courses were as follows:

December 2010— These classes were for landscape professionals and taught basic soil, plant & water relationships and prepared the attendees to be landscape irrigation auditors.

January 2011—These classes were for agricultural customers and taught basic soil, plant and water relationships, irrigation scheduling, salinity and energy evaluations.

February 2011— These classes were also for agricultural customers and taught basic pipeline hydraulics, pump & filtration, maintenance on drip systems .

March 2011— These classes were for residential customers and taught attendees how to convert an existing landscape and complete a well planned, water-efficient design.

Fun Facts About Agriculture

Lettuce is a member of the sunflower family.

Darker Green lettuce leaves are more nutritious than lighter green leaves.

Almost all lettuce is packed right in the field.

The name asparagus comes from the Greek language and means "sprout" or "shoot."

California grows about 70% of all the asparagus grown in the United States.



Delta-Mendota Canal



Paicines Canal
Summer 2009



Paicines Canal
Winter 2011



Ag Classes in January

We forget that the water cycle and the life cycle are one.

Jacques Yves Cousteau

Interview with a Former SBCWD Board Member... 'It's all about the water balance.'

by Shawn Novack

Robert "Bob" Swanson served on the District's Board from November 1986 to November 2010. Bob is a life-long resident of San Benito County. He served as Director and past President of the San Benito County Farm Bureau as well as a past Board Director of the 33rd District Agricultural Association for 18 years. As an active beef and vegetable producer in and around our county, Bob has a strong interest in furthering the reliability of our water supply for future generations.

Shawn Novack, Water Conservation Program Manager, went out to Bob's ranch in Tres Pinos to interview him about his many years of community service as a board member.

Water is in His "Blood"

In the early part of the 20th century Bob's family settled near the end of Thomas Road by the San Benito River. The water from the river was vital to the orchards his family planted. "We didn't have deep wells so water had to be pulled out of the river. The river was part of our lives."

Even after the Hernandez Reservoir was built and water was being percolated along major stretches of the San Benito River, his family still had to use river water.

"I grew up knowing the importance of that river so I became very conscious of what was going on in Zone 3 and the San Benito River system. Maybe not the entire zone, but at least back to Hernandez Reservoir."

Becoming a SBCWD Board Member

This relationship with the river inspired Bob to serve on the San Benito County Water District Board. However, he didn't realize his opportunity to be on the Board would come when a good friend, Bill Renz, passed away unexpectedly. Bill represented District 4 on the SBCWD Board.

"Bill and I were about a generation apart, but we became good friends. We saw a lot of each other and talked all the time. When I was on the 33rd District Agricultural Association Bill was over at Saddle Horse. When I was serving on one arm of Farm Credit he was serving in another arm. We had a lot of interaction and a lot of it was about water. So, I had a fair amount of insight about the District before I got on the Board. I learned a lot from Bill."

When Bill Renz passed away George Thomas was manager of the District. George came out to Bob's ranch to talk to him about serving out Bill's term. "I told George I didn't think I could do it. He asked why not and I said you were my 4H leader and I have to respect you. You and I will bicker about Zone 3 the whole time I'm on the Board. George laughed, but understood and appreciated me telling him my feelings." After George's visit Bob gave the thought about being a board member some serious consideration and decided it was time to serve. Bob contacted George and told him he wanted to be considered as a replacement for Bill. He was appointed to the Board in 1986.

Learning the Ropes

Bob was very fortunate to work with a lot of good people. Harry Cullum was one of these people that came in to Bob's life. "Harry forgot more about water under our feet than most people will ever learn."

The many wells Harry dug gave him a very interesting perspective of aquifer activity. Bob gave an example of this perspective, "He use to tell me the deepest aquifer in the county is south of Paicines. I asked him how he knew this and Harry said from the wells he drilled in that area. The water was cold and this meant it was a large aquifer. Harry dug a lot of wells in that area and he was proven right."

George Thomas did a wonderful job as manager and Ernie Ricotti did a good job of managing Hernandez Reservoir and the percolation of the San Benito River according to Bob. "They were people you could learn from just by watching their activities."

Out of all the people Bob has met, there were three key people who helped him learn about water in our community. Bill Renz, the man Bob replaced was one and another was Dave Porteur. "I couldn't have served with a better guy than Dave. He was on the Board and was a real mentor to me. He was straight, honest, he did what he thought was right and he was tough. I admired all these things about Dave."

Ray Sabittini was the third person that was key to Bob's local water knowledge. Ray lived out on Shore Road and gave Bob a lot of insight about water in that area. "I knew nothing about North County water until I leased a ranch from Ray. He'd come out and visit with me and we talked a lot about water in the North County."

Life as a Director

The issues and topics became more complex over time. I asked Bob how did he prepare for the wide range of subjects, issues and problems the District contends with.

"How do you prepare yourself? I think the biggest contributor to me in preparing myself was our Committee Meetings and the information I was given to read and digest that came out of these meetings."

"I also felt it important to go to the Water Users Conference." This is an annual conference, attended by the Bureau of Reclamation and managers, directors, operation staff from districts served by Bureau of Reclamation. "It kind of gives you an overall view or big picture of Bureau of Reclamations activities in the west."

"A person can become isolated in their thinking and this meeting kind of broadens your horizon. There are certain events or issues that the District has no control over and these meetings helped me accept...I don't know if that's the right word, but it helped me understand the arena we were playing in...the big arena."

[Continued on back page](#)

Continued from page 3—Bob Swanson interview:

Bob went on to say these meetings helped him understand the things that are out of the Districts control, but by learning the issues that other agencies are up against helped him understand and help the District prepare and/or adapt to policies or issues that impacted San Benito County. “A person has to learn what’s going on in the world, not just San Benito County.”

Challenges

Bringing Central Valley Project (CVP) water to San Benito County and installing the distribution system to deliver that water was a big challenge to Bob, the rest of the Board and the entire community. “We did a good job of getting the distribution system in place, but there were a lot of wrinkles that had to be ironed out.”

The distribution system and the contract with the Bureau of Reclamation took a long time to set in place. Town Hall Meetings were held and there was a large effort to educate the public on the pro’s and con’s of these projects. Bob emphasized that, “Education was the key to public support.”

Bringing CVP water in to our community has really paid off too “...just drive down Fairview Road and see all the different crops that are grown thanks to the better quality water from the CVP system. It’s really been good for the local economy.”

One of the biggest contributing factors in making these projects a success was from the community working together. The Farm Bureau was instrumental in the success of the distribution system. “During that period of time probably 20-25% of the Directors at the monthly Farm Bureau meetings would be at the Districts water meetings. They were production agriculture people, farmers if you want, and they helped the District Board and my decision making. They gave us a lot of good insight. I appreciated that because these were the same people who would use the distribution system.”

Looking Ahead

The future of agricultural water deliveries from the CVP system is uncertain. Bob thinks, “CVP water will be delivered at 70-80% of historical allocations to the Municipal and Industrial (M&I) sector. We don’t know how much agricultural water will get slashed, but it will. People think the District is going to take away the water from agriculture and give it to the City. The District isn’t the one that will do that. The Bureau isn’t going to say we’re going to take away 5,000 acre-feet of water from agriculture and give it to the municipalities. They’re going to say, we don’t have enough water to give to agriculture, but we have an obligation for health and safety to deliver M&I water.”

“The municipalities will get their allocations and should the District sit back and not make every effort to bring that water in because we don’t have a water treatment plant and our aquifers are high and we can’t percolate? No, that’s wrong!

We need to take that water whenever we can get it, whether we have to buy that water on the Spot Market or get what we can get through the Bureau or bank it or whatever the situation is like. Maybe it means working conjunctively with Santa Clara Valley Water District. Whatever it takes, maybe a combination of all these ideas. It’s all about the water balance.”

Current Challenges

One of the Districts biggest challenges is happening right now. “The challenge is educating people on how much bang they’ll get for their buck from the projects the District is currently working on.”

“There needs to be Town Hall Meetings to bring this information to the public so they realize the benefits of the proposed projects in the Hollister Urban Area Water and Wastewater Master Plan (HUAWWMP). The benefits will be derived from the better water quality that the people will receive in the urban area. Some people don’t have any concept on how better quality water will save them money on replacing washing machines, dishwashers, faucets...right down the line. These proposed projects will not only benefit the residents in the City, but agriculture will benefit as well. They will be able to use this same water after it passes through the City’s reclamation plant where it will be recycled back to agriculture. That’s productivity! “

Bob realizes that there are many challenges ahead in bringing these projects online. “A lot of people will argue that it’s not feasible to install another distribution system to handle recycled water. I say that’s a bunch of baloney, it will happen if there’s a need for it and I think we’ll see that need as time goes on. I wouldn’t have thought this way 10 years ago.

Farmers accept a natural drought, but this bureaucratic drought like we’ve been dealing with the last few years has opened some eyes. That’s what we’re dealing with now and that’s frustrating.”

Looking Back

I asked Bob how he felt the day he resigned from being a Director on the Board for the SBCWD. His reply was, “...the day I resigned from the Board I felt really comfortable in the direction the District was going with the projects contained in the HUAWWMP. These projects will give us more local control of our water supply and further the reliability of our water supply while improving the quality of the water we use at home and on the farm.

There will always be challenges. There will always be a need for improvements to our distribution system and other related systems for our water supply.”