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Contact: Johnny Amaral (559-799-6192)
Alex Biering (916-628-0431)

FRIANT WATER AUTHORITY APPROVES LANDMARK AGREEMENT WITH EASTERN TULE GROUNDWATER SUSTAINABILITY AGENCY REGARDING IMPACTS TO THE FRIANT-KERN CANAL

Lindsay, CA – On Friday, December 11, the Friant Water Authority (FWA) Board of Directors approved a proposed settlement agreement with the Eastern Tule Groundwater Sustainability Agency (ETGSA) that will resolve a dispute over the impacts of local groundwater pumping on the Friant-Kern Canal. In the settlement, FWA is agreeing to support implementation of ETGSA’s Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) that will gradually reduce overdraft through 2035 in exchange for significant contributions of funding towards fixing the Friant-Kern Canal’s most severe capacity limitations. Payments from ETGSA to FWA under the agreement can begin as early as the first quarter of next year, consistent with when construction is expected to begin for the Friant-Kern Canal Middle Reach Capacity Correction Project.

Negotiations between the agencies began earlier this year following finalization of ETGSA’s January 2020 GSP, which included assumptions of up to three feet of future subsidence along the Friant-Kern Canal’s already capacity-limited middle reach during the planning period of the GSP. This amount of future subsidence would reduce FWA’s ability to deliver water to a number Friant Contractors, causing significant water supply impacts. It is expected that ETGSA’s board of directors will consider the proposed agreement in the very near future; if final approval is given, the agreement will be finalized and made publicly available.

“These were very challenging discussions for us because we were negotiating with friends, family, neighbors, and even one another, each of whom has their own needs for water,” said FWA Chairman Chris Tantau. “I want to commend FWA’s directors and staff, along with ETGSA’s, for their hard work and for negotiating an agreement that helps achieve the goals of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act while also providing a secure near-term funding stream for the Friant-Kern Canal Middle Reach Capacity Correction Project.”

“This agreement shows that win-win solutions are possible, even in the difficult environment the San Joaquin Valley is facing with SGMA,” said FWA Chief Executive Officer Jason Phillips. “Having a fully functioning Friant-Kern Canal will be critical as we continue the efforts to develop needed recharge water to comply with SGMA and keep our Valley communities and farms thriving.”

ETGSA’s boundaries include a large portion of the Friant-Kern Canal’s middle reach, where current conveyance capacity has already diminished from the canal’s design capacity by more than 60%, resulting in as much as 300,000 acre-feet of water remaining undelivered by the canal in some years to farms and communities in the southern San Joaquin Valley.