COALITION OPPOSES BILLS TO OVERHAUL WATER RIGHTS RULES

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As California experiences wild swings in climate from drought to floods, critics of the state’s water rights system seek to overhaul rules that date back to California’s founding in 1850.

Three water rights bills are pending in the California Legislature that would expand the authority of the California State Water Resources Control Board. The bills are opposed by a large coalition that includes dozens of farm groups, water agencies and business groups. Kristopher Anderson, legislative advocate for the Association of California Water Agencies, said the bills “collectively and individually present a foundational change in the way California’s water rights system is implemented, managed and enforced.”

ACWA, which represents more than 460 public water agencies that deliver 90% of water throughout the state, is joined by the California Farm Bureau and others in opposing the three measures:

- Assembly Bill 460, by Assembly Member Rebecca Bauer-Kahan, D-Orinda, would give the state water board authority to issue interim relief orders to curtail water diversions. The measure also would increase civil fines for violations of the orders.
- AB 1337, by Assembly Member Buffy Wicks, D-Oakland, would give the water board legal authority to override claims of water rights for the purpose of ordering curtailments.
- Senate Bill 389, by State Sen. Ben Allen, D-Santa Monica, would authorize the state board to adopt regulations that enable it to investigate the diversion and use of water from a stream system to determine basis of right.

“The bills would authorize the state water board to impose punitive penalties on even law-abiding water right holders, curtail water rights in any year and strip entities of their water rights,” Anderson said. “This legislation would create a significant amount of uncertainty and lead to unintended consequences, not just for water right holders, but communities and businesses across the state that depend on a reliable water supply.”

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With that as a background, I am pleased to be able to share with you this month, that after a year and a half of dedicated work and commitment from the Friant Water Authority Board of Directors and staff, the United States Bureau of Reclamation, and the construction contractor, the much-anticipated canal lining has begun.

Just a few days ago, the heavy equipment that is designed specifically for projects like ours began the steady process of pouring the concrete that will become the new realigned canal. Starting just north of Deer Creek, and headed north, you will see in the images contained in this month’s newsletter what we’ve all been waiting for. It’s a welcome sight. It’s anticipated that with every day that passes, about 2000 linear feet of canal lining will be poured.

To be sure, there’s still several months of hard work ahead, but it’s safe to say that this project, which is the most important major construction project in Valley, is nearing completion.

Stay tuned for more.
MEET THE FRIANT FAMILY

AARON FUKUDA
General Manager
Tulare Irrigation District

Aaron Fukuda is general manager of the Tulare Irrigation District, where he oversees the district’s day-to-day operations while continuing to promote the conjunctive use operations of the district and its growers. Recently, Aaron was also appointed as the interim general manager of the Mid-Kaweah Groundwater Sustainability (MKGSA) agency, where he coordinates water activities with surrounding jurisdictions, including the development of the groundwater sustainability plan for the MKGSA. Previously, he spent six years as an associate engineer specializing in agricultural hydraulic design at Summers Engineering. Aaron obtained his Bachelor of Science in civil engineering from Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo in 2000 and his master’s in public administration from California State University, Fresno. He was born and raised in Hanford, California.

SAM STOOPS
Water Resources Technician

Growing up north of Visalia in the country on a small farm, Sam Stoops learned from his father who lived it, “If it’s worth doing, it’s worth doing right.” For Sam, he had a ditch running behind his childhood home, but he never dreamed that he would be operating a 150-mile canal. After attending College of the Sequoias in Visalia, and Point Loma Nazarene University in San Diego, Sam worked for a company for four years that built power supplies and main frames for computers. He married his wife Ruth and began working for a circuit board manufacturer in the quality control department and then ran a testing department until it closed. In February 1992, he began working for Friant Water Users Authority as a Canal System Operator. For nine years, Sam calibrated transmitters and recorders to measure the flows going to the water districts. In 2001, he then started operating the canal and accounting for all the water going through it as a Water Resource Technician.

Rick and his wife have five children and 10 grandchildren, who they love spending time with. He is also going to be hitting a very special milestone with his wife, as they will be celebrating their 40th wedding anniversary this upcoming October. One of his biggest challenges was on March 10, 2023, dealing with all the water cuts in the canal so they could handle the flooding. Water Operations cut 950 cubic feet per second on the four days before March 10. He says that, “I did not think it was possible, but with everyone’s help, and of many prayers, we made it through.” Sam is extremely thankful for the opportunities at Friant and loves working his job. “It’s been the hardest and best here at Friant Water Authority, the people here and at the Districts have been fantastic.”

PODCAST OF THE MONTH

A VOICE FOR RURAL AMERICA
THE CENTRAL VALLEY: A CASE FOR INVESTMENT IN AMERICA’S WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

Congressional Western Caucus Chairman Dan Newhouse (WA-04) hosts Rep. John Duarte (CA-13) and Executive Vice President of Harris Farms, Inc., William Bourdeau, to discuss the importance of investment in water infrastructure in the Central Valley in California and throughout the country as well as the critical role of the federal government in supporting communities impacted by dilapidated water infrastructure systems.

RICK BORGES
Vice Chairman
Director - Tulare Irrigation District

Rick serves on the Friant Water Authority Board of Directors representing Tulare Irrigation District, where he serves as vice-chair of the board. He serves as an alternate on the Executive Committee and chairs the O&M committee. Rick is a fourth generation farmer in Tulare. He started farming in 1986, became a partner in Borges Farms in 1990, and currently continues in that partnership and farms separately as R S Borges Farming. Rick is married to his wife Susie and they have two children, Greg and Breann. Greg is the fifth generation working on the farm. Rick represents the TID board as a Director for the Tulare Irrigation Company, and Kaweah and St. Johns Rivers Association, and is a Director for Kaweah Basin Water Quality Association.
FRIANT-KERN CANAL MIDDLE REACH CAPACITY CORRECTION CONSTRUCTION PROGRESS UPDATE

Cleanup work from the March storms continued around the Deer Creek Site. Canal embankment was placed at Avenue 128 and worked towards Avenue 104 as well as between Avenue 88 and Road 192. Avenue 128 also had additions installed such as: siphons, formwork, water stops, bulkheads, and reinforcing bars. Avenue 112 had concrete poured after reinforcing bars were placed for the deck and headwall sections; it was also re-opened to the public. Road 192 siphon had structural backfill, aggregate roadway base and asphalt paving put in place. This road was also re-opened to the public. Road 208 siphon and Avenue 80 siphon both had reinforcing bars placed and concrete poured. Currently, Terra Bella Avenue, Avenue 80 and 128, and Road 208 siphons are closed as construction is in progress.

Canal embankment construction between Avenue 80 and Road 192

Trimming and concrete lining being installed north of Deer Creek on east bank headed north

Canal embankment between Avenue 80 and Road 192

End Phase 1 Project

Avenue 80 siphon excavation and foundation slab

Road 192 siphon crossing completed with new pavement

Avenue 128 siphon
IN THE NEWS

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"DWR Awards $9.2 Million in Grants to Protect Communities from Floods, Support Fish Populations and Restore Streams," Department of Water Resources, July 7, 2023.
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"Robert Rivas Sworn in as the 71st Speaker of the California State Assembly: Championing Agricultural Climate Resilience and Justice," CalCAN, June 30, 2023
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