

## THE SAN JOAQUIN DELTA....WHY SHOULD WE CARE??

Much has been written about the current crisis in the Sacramento – San Joaquin delta, where both northern and southern California cities and west side agriculture receive the bulk of their respective water supplies. State and federal water delivery systems that begin in the delta depend on the continued ability to move contracted water supplies out of the delta through massive water pumps, water that goes from Los Banos to Los Angeles and beyond. What we may not realize is how much we depend on the Delta for our water.

### **Perfect Storm**

The current water year seems to be square in the middle of the “perfect storm” of the natural and man-made factors that has resulted in severe cutbacks in water deliveries out of the delta. The challenges began with an anemic water supply, leading the state to classify 2008 as a “critically dry year.” That was followed by a series of legal challenges and rulings that further restricted the total water available for exports from the delta in favor of various endangered species. Fast forward to 2009 which sees another year of below normal precipitation and another series of rulings that further restrict Delta pumping. While the delta has been in the sights of various environmental and various interest groups for years, 2009 has been the year they hit the jackpot, all at the expense of communities that depend on the delta as their water lifeline. Ok, we all get that it’s bad, but it’s a problem someone else has, we have our own set of problems right here to worry about right? Not so fast.....

### **The Connection....**

Those of us on the east side of the valley are not immune to the devastating effects of adverse water supply rulings that have impacted delta exporters. The Friant Division of the Central Valley Project, where Lower Tule and Pixley receive 75 percent of their water, is dependant on delta exports as well. This is due to our contractual relationship with a group of water users known as the “Exchange Contractors.”

When the Bureau of Reclamation built the Friant Project, it did so by negotiating a deal with four agencies that held the underlying historic water rights on the San Joaquin River. The Bureau agreed to replace, or “exchange” those water rights for a water supply exported out of the delta to be delivered to the original water rights holders. In turn, the San Joaquin River water was dedicated to the east side of the San Joaquin valley, the Friant Division. This relationship has worked great for the past 60-years with everyone living in relative ignorant bliss and never having to worry about what was long thought impossible.

### **...And The Catch**

But here is the catch: if the Exchange Contractor’s water supply out of the delta is compromised, they have the right to call on their original San Joaquin River water, at the expense of the Friant Division districts and communities. And, while the Exchange Contractors have a high priority among delta exporters, more in-delta pumping restrictions will force a call by the Exchange Contractors on Friant water. In fact, there were plans in place in the spring of this year to begin diverting Friant water to the Exchange Contractors when it looked like they would not be able to get enough water from the Delta to meet their 2009 contracts. A wet spring in Northern California was the only thing that separated us from a 25% water supply because once that call is made, Friant is left literally “high and dry.”

So, when looking at the problems in the delta, we would do well to recall the “connection” and the “catch.”