

Video: Surplus and Shortage – California’s Water Balancing Act

Ppic.org, 11/28/22

After three years of virtual events, the PPIC Water Policy Center’s annual fall conference made a welcome return to an in-person format in Sacramento on Friday, November 18. The half-day event began with a welcome from PPIC Water Policy Center assistant director Caity Peterson and a presentation by senior fellow Jeffrey Mount.

“The elephant in the room is that conditions have changed,” said Mount. “We’re no longer talking about some future existential threat.... we have now moved into the era of the hot drought.” Hotter droughts, he said, coupled with a thirstier atmosphere, are testing California’s water system as never before.

This year was “brutal” for agriculture, said Thad Bettner of the Glenn-Colusa Irrigation District during the first panel, moderated by PPIC Water senior fellow Alvar Escriva-Bou. “We took about 300 square miles out of production.” The drought hit rural and urban communities hard, too: Kyle Jones of the Community Water Center said that “over 1,300 [drinking water] wells went dry.” Bill Hasencamp of Metropolitan Water District described in vivid detail how once-reliable water management strategies are failing, in part due to a lack of interconnections: his agency had to restrict deliveries to “one-third of our service area despite having a record amount of dry-year storage reserves.”

The environment suffered as well, though Sandi Matsumoto of The Nature Conservancy praised the State Water Board, River Partners, and others for efforts to aid wildlife. Well-timed curtailments in some basins, she said, were helpful. But the stakes are high, she said: “Over half of California’s salmon and steelhead species are on a trajectory towards extinction.” And as Hasencamp put it, “drought and climate change have outstripped us.”

Capturing more water during wet periods will help California weather the dry periods, said participants in the second panel, moderated by research fellow Andrew Ayres. Sandy Kerl of the San Diego County Water Authority said that investing in reservoir capacity was key after the county suffered a crippling drought in the late ‘80s. “We now have enough storage capacity...to sustain the population at a 75% service level for six months,” she said.

Socking water away in underground water banks is another important strategy, said Mike Tognolini of EBMUD. Such projects rely on good relationships. After some early missteps in a water banking pilot project, he said “we [now] have solid partnerships with local water agencies in San Joaquin County and, importantly...with growers in the region.”

Aaron Fukuda of the Tulare Irrigation District emphasized the importance of trust-building too. “I tell everybody when you want to strike up a partnership, just take them out to dinner,” he said, to laughter. Groundwater recharge works best when relationships are

formed first, and how you approach water right holders matters, he said. “When you ask a farmer for help, they will help.”

Kerl commended Scripps Institution of Oceanography for their “game-changing” atmospheric river forecasts—and panelists highlighted the promise of Forecast-Informed Reservoir Operations (FIRO) as a tool to make the most of storage infrastructure. Local agencies are also making good progress in accounting for water once it’s in the ground—key to facilitating more water banking projects.

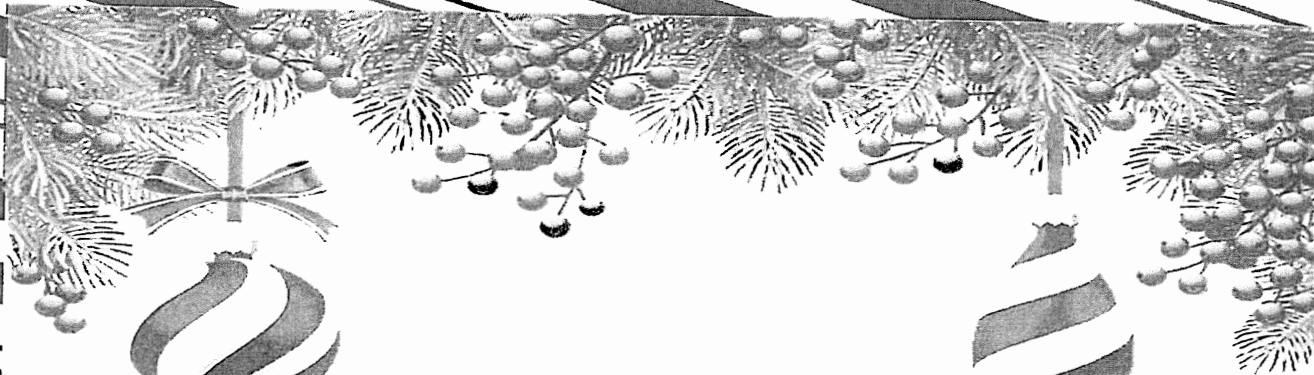
And, as Julie Rentner of River Partners noted, the stakes for managing the increasingly flood-prone wet periods of our changing climate could not be higher. In 1997, the San Joaquin Valley was hit by a flood that broke the valley’s flood control system in 17 places. Climate projections show that a flood three to five times that magnitude “will likely hit the San Joaquin Valley in our lifetimes.” The damage, she said, would be incalculable. But California’s “new Central Valley flood-protection plan...takes a solid look at multi-benefit projects” that slow floods, recharge groundwater, and support habitat restoration.

The day’s final panel looked at policy’s role in responding to climate conditions. PPIC Water Policy Center director Ellen Hanak sat down with California Department of Water Resources director Karla Nemeth, State Water Board Chair E. Joaquín Esquivel, and US Army Civil Works Program assistant secretary Mike Connor. Hanak asked these policy heavy-hitters to share progress and gaps in “this moment of climate whiplash.”

“We’re now in a moment where it’s like ‘Everything, Everywhere, All at Once,’” said Karla Nemeth. “We’re in a multiverse.... everything is moving.” Hotter temperatures have now become “their own water demand,” she said, and Californians need to embrace water recycling, desalination, recharge, and conservation—all while keeping water affordable. But California also needs to think big, she said. “We can’t be afraid of taking out big infrastructure or putting in big infrastructure.” As an example of the former, she noted progress on removal of the dams on the Klamath River. And for the latter, she noted that “the Delta conveyance project is enormously important to climate adaptation.”

Esquivel said that water projects that were state-of-the-art 50 years ago now find themselves “mismatched for the climate that we have.” While data has improved, “data alone is not enough. It has to turn into better decision making.” A “greater fidelity to reality,” he said, will be essential. He said compliance across multiple basins with water right curtailments is heartening. “People want to use rights in ways that help support the resilience of us all.”

Mike Connor shared that much of the country still struggles to understand how profoundly conditions have changed. In one eight-week period this summer, he said, “there were six one-in-one-thousand-year precipitation events across the continental US.” He said that “restoring hydrologic function wherever we can...always adds to water availability by keeping it in the system.” All panelists agreed that increased funding, including from the recently passed Inflation Reduction Act, will be a boon to efforts.



You're Invited To The
SJFB Board of Directors

Christmas Dinner

Italian Athletic Club
3541 N. Cherryland Ave.
Stockton, CA 95215

15
Dec

Social: 5:00 pm
No Host
Dinner: 6:00 pm

Italian Chicken and Roast Beef Dinner

(Name(s): _____

Individual Tickets: _____
(\$25 Per Person)

Please RSVP by Friday, December 9th. For further information, call
(209) 931-4931 or email Jessica@sjfb.org. Please make all checks
payable to San Joaquin Farm Bureau.

2

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55th Annual Mid-Pacific Water Users' Conference

January 25-27, 2023

Silver Legacy Resort Casino, Reno, NV

DRAFT SCHEDULE

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 25

7:30am-5:00pm **REGISTRATION**

8:00am **CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST**

8:30am-12:00pm **CALL TO ORDER/GENERAL SESSION**

Welcome Address

Chris Dahlstrom, Santa Ynez River WCD ID #1 (retired)

KEYNOTE PRESENTATION

Bureau of Reclamation Commissioner Camille Calimlim Touton

Bureau of Reclamation Regional Director Address

Ernest Conant, Regional Director, California-Great Basin

Bureau of Reclamation Regional Leadership Discussion, Deputy Regional Director Highlights and Area Office Q&A

Panel Presentation Moderated by Kevin Kasberg, CVPWA

The CVP View from Ground Zero: Water Authority and District Managers Weigh In

Panel Presentation Moderated by Dan Keppen, Family Farm Alliance

12:15pm-2:00pm **LUNCHEON and PROGRAM**

Klamath Project Report

Paul Simmons, Klamath Water Users Association

The Great Food (Security) Giveaway

Dan Keppen, Family Farm Alliance

Mike Wade, California Farm Water Coalition

5:30pm-7:30pm **EXHIBITOR RECEPTION & SLOTS TOURNAMENT**

THURSDAY, JANUARY 26

7:30am-5:00pm **REGISTRATION**

8:00am-9:10am **BREAKFAST and PROGRAM**

Cachuma Project Report

KEYNOTE PRESENTATION

Congressman Cliff Bentz (INVITED)

9:20am-12:15pm **GENERAL SESSION**

The ESA at Fifty: What Would President Nixon Think?

Panel Presentation Moderated by Paul Simmons, Klamath Water Users Association

Dam if You Do; Damned if You Don't: A New Era of California Water Storage Projects

Panel Presentation Moderated by Jeffrey Sutton, Tehama-Colusa Canal Authority

12:15pm-1:30pm

LUNCHEON and PROGRAM

Regional Director's Water Conservation Award
Ernest Conant, Bureau of Reclamation

Newlands Project Report
Ben Shawcroft, Truckee-Carson Irrigation District

New Congress
Dennis Cardoza, Foley & Lardner LLP
William Ball, Foley & Lardner LLP

1:45pm-3:30pm

MOVIE SCREENING: "California's Watershed Healing"

3:30pm-5:30pm

WORKSHOP: Technical Assistance for Modernization Options
Stuart Styles, Cal Poly ITRC

6:00pm-9:00pm

Dinner and Bowling at the National Bowling Stadium

FRIDAY, JANUARY 27

8:30am-11:30am

BREAKFAST and PROGRAM

Bowling and Slot Tournament Awards

Meet the Cal Poly Scholarship Students

Recapping Water Year 2022
Kristin White, Bureau of Reclamation
Dave Mooney, Bureau of Reclamation

2023 Water Supply Outlook
Bureau of Reclamation