



Westlands Water District

3130 N. Fresno Street, P.O. Box 6056, Fresno, California 93703-6056, (559) 224-1523, FAX (559) 241-6277

STATEMENT BY THOMAS W. BIRMINGHAM, GENERAL MANAGER DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR ALLOCATION ANNOUNCEMENT

For Immediate Release: March 16, 2010
Contact: Sarah Woolf 559-341-0174

Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar today announced an increased allocation of water for south-of-Delta Central Valley Project agricultural water service contractors to 25 percent of their contract. Westlands Water District is very grateful to Secretary Salazar, the Commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation Mike Connor and the other members of the Obama Administration who have been working to bring this relief to the people who live and work on the westside of the San Joaquin Valley. The availability of these additional supplies will enable many farmers to put some of their lands back into production, creating jobs and helping to restore the economic health of the San Joaquin Valley.

We hope the allocation will increase further in the months ahead, and we are encouraged by Secretary Salazar's announcement that Reclamation will accelerate its analysis of potential increases to the allocation. We realize that Secretary Salazar and his colleagues face a difficult task in balancing Reclamation's responsibility to deliver water to the farms and cities served by the Project and their responsibility to protect species under the Endangered Species Act. Secretary Salazar's personal involvement in these issues demonstrates his genuine interest in helping find a solution to this crisis.

Westlands also thanks Senator Dianne Feinstein for her continued efforts on behalf of westside farmers. Her leadership and the strong, consistent support from Representative Dennis Cardoza, Representative Jim Costa, and the other members of the valley delegation, were critically important to securing these additional supplies.

Senator Feinstein has taken a lot of unjustified criticism for trying to relieve a regulatory crisis that has thrown tens of thousands of her constituents out of work. Many of those attacks have come from the same special interests that have consistently opposed the efforts at the state level to repair our broken water system. Had they bothered to talk with Senator Feinstein or consulted the numerous public water agencies that are involved before they launched their attacks, they might not have taken these positions.

California's water crisis is entering a new phase; it should now be apparent to everyone that regardless of how much water exists north of the Delta, restrictions on the movement of that water through the Delta to export areas served by the Central Valley Project and California's State Water Project will cause economic hardship for the foreseeable future. In addition, it is important that everyone involved in the ongoing debate over water policy should be aware of some basic facts.



Westlands Water District

3130 N. Fresno Street, P.O. Box 6056, Fresno, California 93703-6056, (559) 224-1523, FAX (559) 241-6277

First, the economic catastrophe that struck the westside in 2009 cost more than 20,000 people their jobs and forced the fallowing of hundreds of thousands of acres of farmland because there wasn't enough water to grow crops. These impacts have been carefully documented by responsible news reporters from all over California and the nation. The efforts of a few to belatedly suggest that these losses were not real or that somehow the suffering of so many families doesn't matter should be rejected.

Second, the water shortages of 2009 were in large part a function of persistent drought; but the federal restrictions on water supplies added another third to the effects of the drought. These facts are recognized by both state and federal authorities. Although the drought appears to be easing, those regulatory restrictions still remain in effect. So far this year, those restrictions have cost California more than 450,000 acre feet of water that could have been put into storage. These losses have nothing to do with drought.

In previous years, under the same water supply conditions that we have today, California's water users could count on receiving at least 80 percent of their allocations from the state and federal water systems. But because of regulatory restrictions, two-thirds of the state this year will only receive a small fraction of their supplies.

Finally, we need to dispel the myth that these shortages only affected the Westlands Water District and that is because of its "water rights." There are no junior "water rights" that have lead to crisis. The water rights for the Central Valley Project are held by the federal government, and all agricultural water service contractors have the same priority. How water is allocated during periods of shortage is determined by Reclamation's policies, which in most cases have nothing to do with water right priorities. These shortages have affected all of those water users - more than two million people in the Bay Area and the Central Valley -- not just Westlands.

These are all issues that need to be addressed in order to accomplish the co-equal goals of Delta Vision - repairing the environment of the Delta and restoring reliability to California's water system. In his announcement today Secretary Salazar rightly emphasized the importance of moving beyond short-term fixes to this ongoing crisis and focusing instead on a long term plan. We could not agree more. Westlands is committed to the vital, collaborative work of developing the Bay Delta Conservation Plan. Through that effort, we are working together with scientists, environmentalists, economists, engineers and fish and wildlife experts to build a better future for California.

###