



Westlands Water District

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Federal Water Allocation Decrease Will Harm Farming, Communities

FRESNO - Local communities face more than \$1 billion in lost economic activity due to reduced water supplies for farmers in Westlands Water District. Today, the Bureau of Reclamation announced that the allocation of water for farmers served by Westlands and other south-of-Delta Central Valley Project water service contractors would be reduced from 25% to 20%, which will make the economic calamity worse.

“The water supply reductions facing farmers will devastate the local communities. We understand that the most recent cut imposed by Reclamation is a result of record dry conditions experienced in January, February, and March; but this reduction is being imposed after the loss of hundreds-of-thousands of acre-feet of water experienced during a record wet December. Those losses are difficult to comprehend,” said Thomas Birmingham, general manager of Westlands Water District. “Once again, the needs of our community and the livelihood of our workers are being sacrificed due to questionable decisions by federal officials to protect Delta smelt. We must put an end to project operations that fail to capture water when it is available, only to see a record dry period that further devastates communities that rely on irrigated agriculture for their existence. Our water supply infrastructure is broken. The laws that were designed to protect fish and provide some reasonable balance between the needs of fish and people for water have failed. Something must be done to correct these failures.”

More than 800,000 acre feet of water was lost from mid-December through the end of January due to pumping restrictions imposed under the 2008 biological opinion for Delta smelt. For Westlands Water District this equates to a loss of 195,000 acre feet of water that has gone out to the ocean without being directed to farmland. This lost water would have enabled 100,000 acres of agriculture land to be put into production producing food products. Instead, farmers in Westlands will lose \$350 million of revenue, the regional economy will lose more than \$1 billion in economic activity, thousands of farm workers will lose their jobs, and businesses and communities in the San Joaquin Valley that support irrigated agriculture will suffer significant loss and hardship.

“This decrease in our water allocation once again demonstrates how broken the state’s water system has become. When we continue to lose water because of questionable fish actions, we can be assured our priorities are misaligned,” added Birmingham.

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