



Westlands Water District

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PRESS RELEASE

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Westlands Water District

Statement from Westlands Water District on Bureau of Reclamation's Initial Water Supply Allocation

FRESNO, CA – Any person not intimately familiar with the constraints on operations of the Central Valley Project (CVP) imposed by the Endangered Species Act and other federal laws, would expect that all water contractors would this year receive a 100 percent allocation. With a near record-setting year of rainfall, runoff, and snowpack, anything less would be indefensible. Remarkably, the Bureau of Reclamation did not announce a full allocation but instead announced a 2017 initial water allocation announcement of 65 percent for South-of-Delta Central Valley Project agricultural contract water districts.

If a 100 percent allocation is not possible this year, when, if ever, would a 100 percent allocation be possible? After all, the public has been told repeatedly that low allocations are due to drought, not regulations. But this year is proof that such assertions are false.

Westlands Water District is thankful that the Bureau of Reclamation's initial water allocation provides a significant amount of water this year. But that appreciation is framed by two consecutive years of zero water followed by 5 percent being available from the CVP. In the context of sound water resource management, a 65 percent allocation approaches the unbelievable, given the amount of water available in the system. This allocation will compel farmers to continue to rely on groundwater, at a time when sound principles of conjunctive use would otherwise demand that groundwater not be pumped.

The announcement is particularly disappointing in light of the fact that the allocation was delayed well into the planting season, forcing growers to make decisions about hiring, business operations, and land use without any certainty of water resources.

Given the near-record snowpack and water storage levels, a 65 percent allocation demonstrates that current operational constraints, regulations, and punitive laws have hamstrung the CVP's ability to provide water to California communities. The partial allocation is evidence for the need to change the laws governing water deliveries. We urge our elected officials to work with federal and state agencies to seek long-term solutions that will achieve the original purpose of the CVP and provide a healthy water supply for future generations.

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Westlands Water District is the largest agricultural water district in the United States, made up of more than 1,000 square miles of prime farmland in western Fresno and Kings Counties. Under federal contracts, Westlands provides water to 700 family-owned farms that average 875 acres in size.