



Westlands Water District

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Statement from Thomas Birmingham Regarding “Water Hoarding”

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There has been some confusion created by an irresponsible and misleading claim by the California Sportfishing Protection Alliance that it has “discovered” that Westlands Water District has been “hoarding [sic] surplus water it can’t use.”

At the end of the 2008 water year, Westlands had approximately 300,000 acre-feet of water which CalSPA claims was hoarded. The reality is that this is water that Westlands carried over in storage in anticipation of a low allocation from the Bureau of Reclamation. Had Westlands not planned for this contingency, its farmers would have started the 2009 water year with zero surface water for the irrigation of crops because Reclamation gave Westlands and other south-of-Delta Central Valley Project irrigation service contractors a zero percent allocation. Ultimately, Westlands received a ten percent of its allocation of contract water supplies from the Central Valley Project, the most severe cutback in the project’s history. Many of our family farmers have only managed to survive this year by pumping groundwater at rates that cannot be sustained. But even so, more than 260,000 acres of productive farmland had to be fallowed, leading to the loss of thousands of jobs and billions of dollars for the economy of the Westside.

As we look ahead to 2010, Westlands estimates that it will be carrying over an estimated 270,000 acre feet of water that has been rescheduled for delivery from the federal project in the coming year. There is nothing secretive about this fact. Westlands publishes notices of the condition of our water supplies every month on our website, and that includes rescheduled water as well as all of our other water resources. The website also provides charts, schedules and other graphic materials that trace the use and availability of these supplies month by month. Information on rescheduled water has also been included in periodic public meetings attended by growers and the media, and public concerns about the protection of those supplies were the subject of widespread news coverage last March. Reclamation separately maintains and publishes comprehensive records of rescheduled water supplies which are included in that agency’s various reports and statistical studies.

Where is this water? It is not being held in storage. It is in fact only a promise of future delivery. If these extreme water shortages continue or the demands of other water rights holders take precedence, that water may not be available when a farmer needs it. But this

promise of delivery is nonetheless an asset that farmers can take to the bank as proof that they have a reasonable expectation of having water available to grow their crops next year. And that is critically important for staying in business.

The process of securing financing for next year's planting is beginning now, as this year's reduced harvest is just being brought in. Without this rescheduled water, many farmers would be unable to secure the funds they need to plant a crop for next year. And thus, the catastrophe that the Westside has suffered this year would get even worse.

Why didn't the farmers use all of this water up in 2009? There are lots of reasons. The allocated water did not become available until most cropping decisions had already been made, and even then, there was some uncertainty about its delivery. Also, faced with severe shortages, many farmers elected to apply groundwater for the crops that could survive on it, while protecting higher quality surface supplies for other produce.

This is the way every responsible water agency manages its supplies in times of shortage. We all report how much water we have to use and what we are holding in reserve. We conserve wherever we can. If we had nothing in reserve, our consumers would begin next year with no water at all. That would be irresponsible. But no one suggests that the water in Shasta Lake is being hoarded or that the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California is doing the wrong thing when it orders a cutback in deliveries to 20 million people even though it has water in its reservoirs. Westlands is no different.