



Westlands Water District

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

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CONTACT: Gayle Holman

(559) 241-6233

Westlands Water District Sees Drought Declaration as Key Element of Addressing Immediate Water Crisis

Fresno, CA – Westlands Water District praised today's action by Governor Jerry Brown to issue an emergency drought declaration for the State of California.

"The Governor's declaration recognizes that the State of California is facing unprecedented drought conditions. The situation in the San Joaquin Valley is particularly critical. After several consecutive dry years, compounded by regulations that have restricted water deliveries through the federal Central Valley Project and the California State Water Project, the people who live and work in agricultural areas of the Valley are facing a disaster," said Tom Birmingham, General Manager, Westlands Water District.

Westside Valley farmers who receive water from the Central Valley Project expect to receive a zero allocation under water service contracts, and because of historic dry conditions, the availability of water through transfers will be limited. These shortages will lead to massive land fallowing with severe reductions in agricultural production. In Westlands, it is estimated that more than 200,000 acres of farmland will not be planted. The economic losses resulting from this increased fallowing will only make worse the human suffering that already exists in disadvantaged communities that have unemployment rates higher than the state average. Agriculture related industries including: processing, packaging, transportation, shipping and distribution will also suffer.

The lack of water has direct socio-economic impacts on families in the Valley due to lost jobs. During the drought in 2009, Fresno's Community Food Bank distributed 9 million pounds of food at an estimated value of \$13.5 million. It is anticipated that the need in 2014 will be even greater.

"If irrigated agriculture is going to survive this year, it will require close coordination and cooperation among state and federal agencies that exercise authority over water project operations. Governor Brown's declaration will facilitate that coordination and

cooperation and will enable state agencies to re-examine and modify existing regulations to rebalance competing uses of water in light of these unprecedented conditions,” Birmingham stated. Birmingham added, “Governor Brown’s declaration of a drought emergency will reinforce the message to federal agencies that we are not dealing with ‘business as usual.’”

Westlands encompasses more than 600,000 acres of farmland in western Fresno and Kings Counties, and more than 50,000 people live and work in the communities dependent on the District's agricultural economy. Earlier this week, the Governor met with local farmers and water agency managers to hear firsthand of the severity of the water crisis and its anticipated effects.

“The Governor’s declaration will help mitigate the drought’s negative impacts for Valley families, but it does not address the larger problem of chronic water supply shortages,” stated Birmingham. The current disaster facing the San Joaquin Valley, indeed all of California, is just further evidence that we must invest in new water supply infrastructure, including storage and conveyance, to sustain the state’s economy and we must fix problems in the Delta.

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