



## **SAN LUIS & DELTA MENDOTA WATER AUTHORITY**

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### **Agreement reached on amendments to San Joaquin River Restoration Bill**

Today, the San Luis & Delta Mendota Water Authority, Merced Irrigation District, the San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors Authority, the Merced, Turlock, Modesto, Oakdale and South San Joaquin Irrigation Districts, and Westlands Water District announced their support of enactment of the San Joaquin River Restoration Settlement Act. An agreement regarding amendments to the Act that calls for water contract security for these “third party” water agencies has eliminated their concerns that other amendments of the Act that would enable the legislation to move forward under congressional “pay-go” rules could result in water supply reductions for the third party water agencies.

“It was important that the third parties not be impacted by the latest amendments that were proposed by Sen. Feinstein on Sept. 26,” said Dan Nelson, executive director of the San Luis & Delta Mendota Water Authority. “After receiving the proposed amendments the third parties identified four areas of impact, including protection of water rights, prevention of seepage impacts to lands adjacent to the river, additional fish barriers and no introduction of anadromous fish until mitigation measures are completed.

“The protection of existing water rights and contracts has always been a fundamental issue for the third parties and one particular group, the San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors Water Authority, had to receive the legislative guarantee of no modification of their senior rights as set

forth in their Exchange Contract before the legislation moved forward. This legislative guarantee is consistent with the settlement itself which provided the settlement would not have adverse effects on third parties.”

Once again, Valley Congressmen Dennis Cardoza and Jim Costa engaged on our behalf and were instrumental in getting the final third party protections included in the legislation. As of Nov. 10 the four areas of additional protection were adequately addressed and the third parties once again are in support of the legislation being enacted.”

The proposed legislation is the result of an agreement reached to resolve a lawsuit brought by a group of environmental organizations against the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation over the operation of Friant Dam. The environmental groups argued that the historic operation of Friant Dam prevented sufficient water from flowing down the San Joaquin River to the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, thus eliminating a valuable fishery. The settlement agreement was reached after a lengthy 20-year court battle. The proposed legislation is a part of that agreement and in its present form calls for \$88 million from water users in the Friant system to begin the restoration project as part of a PayGo requirement for shared funding.

“The farmers in the third-party districts have developed an agricultural community that provides a valuable supply of food and fiber products and also thousands of jobs,” Nelson said. “This community and its thousands of workers would be in jeopardy if the settlement agreement threatens their water supply or ability to farm“

Nelson noted that agreement has also been reached in the proposed legislative language that would provide protection against losses from water seepage from the increased flows in the river as more water is released from Friant Dam to replenish the fishery.

“Farms that are located alongside parts of the river could lose a part of their land because of the wet conditions resulting from the potential seepage,” he added. “Safeguards have been put into the proposed legislation to protect or mitigate these farms.”

Language now in the proposed legislation also includes new fish screens and a guarantee of no introduction of anadromous fish until mitigation measures are completed.

The third parties include the San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Authority, the San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors Water Authority, the Merced, Turlock, Modesto, Oakdale and South San Joaquin Irrigation Districts, Westlands Water District, and private land owners along both sides of the river.

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