



KRCD News

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Federal, State Agencies Place Flood Control Squeeze on Kings

Stepped-up federal and state regulatory interest in flood management is frustrating area landowners and clouding the integrity of the highly maintained and well-regarded lower Kings River flood management system.

The three-pronged array of flood management-related efforts are being undertaken by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and California Department of Water Resources (DWR).

Participating actively in these processes is the Kings River Conservation District. For nearly 40 years, KRCD has been the Kings River's lead flood management agency.

KRCD operates flood management facilities under a Corps of Engineers agreement from southwest of Kingsburg to Empire Weir No. 2 at State Route 41 on the Clark's Fork-South Fork system and to State Route 145 (McMullen Grade) on the North Fork-James Bypass system. KRCD is also responsible for portions of the main Kings River, Cole Slough, Dutch John Cut and the Crescent Bypass. A total of 140 miles of levees in all.

"There are several flood management issues emerging," said KRCD General Manager David Orth. Among them are U.S. Army Corps of Engineers inspections of Kings River flood control works, separate flood plain remapping efforts by FEMA and DWR that could include large numbers of additional properties, potential for changes in flood forecasting and coordinated operations, and effects of the just-being-implemented San Joaquin River Restoration Program on Kings River flood management. The



first 4,750 c.f.s. of Kings River flood release flows are typically discharged through the North Fork system to the San Joaquin River.

The District has historically received top marks for its flood management and maintenance work. KRCD's operation

continued on page 4

KRCD Levees Ready

Despite negative scoring by U.S. Army Corps of Engineers inspectors, the Kings River Conservation District's flood management staff has its portion of the Kings River flood control project in good condition.

So far, the 2009-10 season's Kings River water supply prospects coupled with ample amounts of available reservoir storage are not providing much sign that Pine Flat flood releases will materialize.

It has been nearly four years since above-average precipitation and limited available storage capacity combined to compel the Corps to make Pine Flat flood releases.

Handling maintenance work are members of KRCD's Riverdale-based operations staff. In preparation for any high flows during the winter and spring months, KRCD has conducted channel sediment removal, weed and brush control, and rodent control. Access road maintenance also took place.

New Water Year Off to a Good Start

Fall storms are far from a guarantee on how a water year may turn out, but 2009-10 has recorded a promising start under the influence of what is predicted by forecasters to be a relatively strong El Niño event.

That's good news following a third consecutive below average water year that concluded September 30, 2009.

"It's still too early to draw any conclusion about how this water year may turn out, but early storm activity and long-range forecasts are showing promise," said Kings River Watermaster Steve Haugen, who manages the Kings River Water Association.

That would be welcomed. KRWA reported the 2008-09 calculated full natural flow on the Kings River as 1,348,173 acre-feet, or 79.4 percent of average, a little better than the 71 percent water year total experienced in 2007-08.

During the peak April through July runoff period in 2009, the Kings River discharged 1,006,901 acre-feet – or 81.5 percent of average.

For a third straight year, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Kings River Conservation District had no flood releases to manage.

The 2009-10 water year got off to a good start when a tropically spawned heavy rainstorm drenched the thirsty watershed October 13-14, limiting snowfall to the Sierra Nevada's highest elevations. Reports of 7-8 inches of rain were common across the watershed. Dinkey Creek gauge reported more than 12 inches.

Much of the big rainfall accumulation soaked in but the calculated inflow to Pine Flat Reservoir did have a brief peak of 17,772 cubic feet per second on October 14 with a mean daily natural flow of 11,490 c.f.s.

After a few small storms, a series of cold early December events brought some snow as low as the foothills and blanketed elevations above 6,000-7,000 feet with the sea-

continued on page 4



*General Manager's Report
David Orth*

The Katrina Factor

What Hurricane Katrina did so devastatingly to New Orleans is nearly 1,800 miles and more than four years removed from the central San Joaquin Valley.

Effects of the ruinous storm and massive flooding it unleashed as a result of levee failures are turning up closer to home than you may think – right along the Kings River.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers evaluation standards for levees and flood channels, such as those that the Kings River Conservation District operates and maintains, have changed radically. Under the new guidelines, conditions within KRCD's system have gone from being acceptable to the Corps to nearly two-thirds now being declared "unacceptable" or "minimally acceptable," generally because of alleged erosion, vegetation and various encroachments.

What has actually changed on the ground? Nothing.

KRCD's hardworking flood management staff based in Riverdale has the channels and levees in their typical tip-top shape for the current rainy season.

FEMA, meanwhile, has been re-evaluating flood plains along the Kings River with some imaginative and potentially costly results, greatly expanding the supposed flood zone well beyond what have historically been flood-prone areas, thus subjecting more properties to flood insurance requirements.

In fact, FEMA's initial mapping was undertaken as if the historic Kings River levee system did not even exist in most areas, it relied upon "approximation." Engineering analysis was minimal even though FEMA was supposedly to address a flood event that might occur once in every 100 years.

The California Department of Water Resources (DWR) has a new Central Valley flood management planning program, Flood Safe, under way. It was authorized by state legislation passed in 2007 that was motivated by a number of flood management deficiencies – none of which were on the Kings River – which became evident during the most recent big water year, 2005-06.

The legislation specifically excluded the Kings River service area but the current mapping includes the Tulare Lake Basin north of the Kings River in the San Joaquin River flood plain. DWR is using a 200-year flood inundation area. It is possible a 500-year standard could be applied.

All of this spells concern to water agencies and cost to property owners. Levee and channel repairs and reconstruction are not cheap. Nor is flood insurance. There could be strict new land use planning requirements and flood management dictates.

KRCD is staying on top of all this to determine what needs to be done – physically and politically – in response. We have neither reason nor plans to fundamentally change our flood management because it works. Not only does KRCD do an efficient job of maintaining Kings River levees and channels, the District and others are working hard to expand an existing system in which local water demands provide a significant amount of flood control. Two-thirds of Pine Flat flood releases are typically diverted for local groundwater recharge or water banking, conserving surplus water for use in future dry times. We want to save even more.

Flood planning and management are important but they must be based upon reality.

Local Agencies, Cities and Counties Deal with Regional Water Issues

What is believed to be the Kings River's most broadly based effort to address regional water issues now has a formal structure.

A regional water agency has been formed to implement the Kings River Integrated Regional Water Management Plan with the vision of a sustainable supply of the Kings River basin's finite surface and groundwater resources.

Development of infrastructure with a balanced approach that takes into account economic and environmental concerns is planned by the Upper Kings Basin Integrated Regional Water Management Authority, which was formed in September.

Representatives from several local water agencies and the cities of Clovis, Dinuba, Fresno, Kerman, Kingsburg, Parlier, Reedley, Sanger, and Selma created the new agency, joined by repre-

sentatives from local environmental organizations and community service districts.

Clovis Mayor Harry Armstrong chairs the new authority. Fresno Irrigation District General Manager Gary Serrato is vice-chair.

"The formation of the Water Authority is a significant event because it increases collaboration and creates regional water solutions," said Serrato.

Water Authority members have been meeting together for several years as a water forum that developed the Integrated Regional Water Management Plan, a long-term, basin-wide plan.

Applications for state funding of regional projects have largely been successful. More than \$11 million has been brought into the Kings region for plan-

ning and expanding local groundwater projects.

Projects proposed for development in the plan have been identified through an integrated hydrologic model of the Kings River basin to determine optimal benefits to manage and develop the surface and groundwater supplies in a sustainable manner.



Officials from local cities, water agencies, and environmental organizations participate in the first meeting of the Water Authority.



Veteran Kings River Leader White Dies

Garvin H. White of Fresno, who served Kings River water users as a board member for nearly four decades, died October 15, 2009. He was 93.

An Oklahoma native, Mr. White came to California in 1935. He settled in the Kerman-Rolinda area in 1947.

Mr. White was an advocate for good river stewardship, effective water management, power development, and additional water storage.

He served on Fresno Irrigation District's board from 1965-82 and was among those who framed a landmark water-use and revenue agreement between the irrigation district and the cities of Fresno and Clovis to resolve what was then a major issue.

For several years, Mr. White served on the Kings River Water Association Executive Committee. He chaired KRWA for two years. He was a Kings River Conservation District board member from 1971-2004.

State to Vote in 2010 on Water Bonds

Californians will vote in November 2010 on a water bond measure of \$11.14 billion that is part of a five-bill package of water legislation approved by lawmakers and signed into law by Governor Schwarzenegger in November.

The water bond has received most attention and debate but the other four measures – all policy bills – will remain in effect no matter what voters decide on the bond issue. Those measures deal with Delta governance, water conservation, groundwater monitoring, and water diversions and water rights (including new enforcement procedures).

Kings River Conservation District General Manager David Orth is heading a statewide work group that is reviewing the groundwater bill and working with state agencies charged with implementation.

Water bond provisions include such big-ticket items as new storage (including Temperance Flat Reservoir on the San Joaquin River), Delta infrastructure and sustainability, drought relief, regional projects, statewide water system operational improvements, watershed and water quality improvements, groundwater projects and water recycling.

Although not expressly mentioned, many believe the five-bill package could permit development of some form of a long-debated Peripheral Canal around or through the Delta.

KRCD and the Kings River Water Association believe the bonds contain hundreds of millions of dollars that potentially could be used within the Tulare Lake watershed region for a variety of purposes. Those possible uses and projects are in the process of being analyzed.

Flood Squeeze, *continued*

has not changed but the Corps' levee criteria changed significantly since Hurricane Katrina, when the Corps was called on the carpet for the condition and failure of its New Orleans levee system.

Under its new rating system for 18 separate Kings River levee sections, the Corps rates three as minimally acceptable and 15 as unacceptable, largely because of vegetation, erosion and encroachments. KRCD has prepared a Corrective Action Plan to correct the deficiencies noted in the Corps' inspection report to bring the project up to the Corps' new flood control "Operations & Maintenance" standards.

KRCD and its partners in the Kings River Fisheries Management Program (the Kings River Water Association and the Department of Fish and Game) are concerned that new Corps standards for channel flood flow carrying capacity could negatively impact vegetation needed by the fishery.

At the same time, FEMA, another federal agency that has been under the gun since Hurricane Katrina, has been involved in an extensive flood mapping project. "This expansion of the flood mapping area and insurance requirements is a huge financial obligation on the landowners in our region," Orth said. He added, "Unfortunately, trying to get FEMA to remap anything is challenging."

Meanwhile, DWR is undertaking a Central Valley flood protection plan as a result of state legislation enacted in 2007 and has formed a regional conditions work group for the valley in which KRCD is participating.

Under the legislation, the Tulare Lake Basin (which includes the Kings River area) was to have been excluded, but the DWR included all of the land between the San Joaquin and Kings River as part of the planning area being scoped for impacts during flooding occurring once every 200 years. "That could have serious repercussions in flood management, including KRCD's," Orth said.



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New Water Year, *continued*

son's first heavy snowfall, bringing 4½ inches or more of snow water content to many locations.

Automated snow sensors at eight isolated Kings River watershed locations reported an average of 8.7 inches of water content as of mid-December, 28 percent of the critical April 1 normal. April 1 is the date upon which the Sierra snowpack typically reaches its maxi-

mum level. The snow sensor data must await on-site snow course measurements about February 1 to be verified for the season's first runoff forecast.

Long range forecasts, reflecting rising sea surface temperatures in the equatorial Pacific that are a hallmark of an El Niño event call for above-average precipitation over Central California from January through March.

Power Project's Implementation is Suspended

Community Choice energy project implementation is on hold following a summer decision by San Joaquin Valley Power Authority (SJVPA) directors to suspend activities in the innovative energy program developed to benefit Central Valley businesses and residents.

SJVPA and KRCD General Manager David Orth had been negotiating terms for an energy contract with several potential energy service providers to supply energy but several issues hindered the effort.

"We are not immune to the market conditions that are affecting the state and national economy," said Orth. Other concerns included uncertainty in California's energy regulations and the need to contract for additional energy to meet resource adequacy requirements.

"We will continue to monitor these issues for changes that will make condi-

tions more favorable for implementation," said Orth.

In addition, the SJVPA has experienced strong opposition from PG&E, which marketed against the program.

"For the last few years, PG&E has continually placed roadblocks in front of our program in an attempt to stop us from implementing Community Choice and ultimately not providing residents and businesses the opportunity to have a choice about who will provide them power," said Ron Manfredi, city manager of Kerman and chair of the SJVPA. "Considering the hurdles that we are currently facing, it is not possible for the Power Authority to move forward at this time."

On September 29, KRCD board members took related action to withdraw a Community Power Plant application from the California Energy Commission's permitting process.