

**MINUTES  
OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE  
SAN JOAQUIN RIVER EXCHANGE CONTRACTORS WATER AUTHORITY  
HELD FRIDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2023**

The Board of Directors of the *San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors Water Authority (SJRECWA)* met in Regular Session on Friday, December 8, 2023 in the Board Room of the *San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors Water Authority*, 541 “H” Street, City of Los Banos, County of Merced, State of California.

The following persons were present:

**REPRESENTATIVES:**

**Central California Irrigation District (CCID):** Eric Fontana, Director; Jarrett Martin, General Manager

**San Luis Water District (SLCC):** James Nickel, Director, John Wiersma, General Manager

**Firebaugh Canal Water District (FCWD):** Mike Stearns, Vice-Chair; Jeff Bryant, General Manager

**Columbia Canal Company (CCC):** Chris Cardella, Chair; Mike Gardner, General Manager

**STAFF MEMBERS:**

Chris White, Executive Director; Steve Chedester, Director of Policy and Programs; Joann White, Director of Finance and Administration; and Adam Hoffman, Water Resources Specialist

**PRESENT:**

Kimberly Brown, CCC Director; Andrew McClure, Minasian Law; and David Cory, Consultant

The following participated via Conference Call:

Rick Iger, Provost & Pritchard; Lauren Layne, Baker, Manock & Jensen; Manny Amorelli, James Irrigation District

**CALL TO ORDER:**

Chair Chris Cardella called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. and introductions of those participating via teleconference were provided.

**REVIEW OF AGENDA:**

The Executive Director stated there were no changes to the Agenda.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

The unapproved minutes from the November 10, 2023 Board meeting were presented. A motion was made by Director Nickel to approve the minutes as presented. The motion was seconded by Director Fontana and unanimously approved.

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:**

There were no public comments presented.

**BOARD TO APPROVE THE NOVEMBER 2023 EXPENDITURES AND FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT:**

Joann White presented and reviewed the November 2023 Expenditure List and Financial Report.

A motion was made by Director Fontana and seconded by Director Stearns to approve the Expenditure List and Financial Report as presented. The motion was unanimously carried.

**PROPOSED 2024 BUDGET:**

Executive Director White reported that each of the member entity boards have approved the proposed 2024 Budget other than Columbia Canal Company. CCC plans to take action on the matter later this month. He recommended approval of the proposed budget excluding the Del Puerto Canyon Reservoir (DPCR) project expenses contingent on approval by CCC. He next explained that if the Board approves the DPCR Participation Agreement at today’s meeting, he will schedule a meeting with the three participating entities and bring back the DPCR budget item for Board approval. Mr. White said that based on the current cash reserve, he proposes to reduce the first quarter General Membership dues by \$100,000.

A motion was made by Director Stearns and seconded by Director Nickel to approve the proposed 2024 Budget contingent on approval by the CCC Board. The motion was unanimously carried.

**WATER REPORT:**

The Water Resources Specialist referred to the summary page of his Water Report and stated that the Exchange Contractors’ demands have reduced, noting some refuge deliveries. An increase of 75 cubic feet per second (cfs) was made from Friant Dam on December 7th, with a similar increase today for a total of 355 cfs. Following the completion of the maintenance work at Mendota Dam, deliveries will start from the Delta Mendota Canal (DMC) to start filling the Mendota Pool. Mr. Hoffman then said that the planned San Joaquin River Restoration Program (SJRRP) pulse flows of 385 cfs. past Sack Dam has been delayed to February; they are currently up to 160 cfs. and understands that will hold until February. Moving to review of the reservoir storages, he noted that Shasta is drawing down a little and Millerton has gained as a result of work on the Friant-Kern Canal. Next, Mr. Hoffman reported that Delta operations have

increased a little and Jones Pumping Plant is up to four units with the federal share in San Luis Reservoir starting to gain. In conclusion, he stated that the remainder of his report was for informational purposes.

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR’S REPORT:**

Executive Director White said there has been a lot of time closing out the year on review of the 6,000-page Voluntary Agreement document. He said the environmental draft of the Biological Opinion is due out in January and they are working jointly with San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Authority and other agencies on developing comments. One of the major concerns will be how they will affect water operations; currently doing analysis on impacts on both matters.

**DIRECTOR OF POLICY & PROGRAMS REPORT:**

Steve Chedester provided an update on the progress of the 90% design of the Mendota Pool Fish Screen and Control Structure and the recent discovery of complications with the flume design. Additional funding is anticipated for this project in 2024. With regards to the Sack Dam project, they continue to work through the development of the accounting protocol and have submitted comments.

**WATER RESOURCES PLAN (WRP) – UPDATE:**

The Director of Policy & Programs reported that the construction at the Orestimba Creek Project is going well; outlining a few of the remaining items that need to be completed. Mr. Chedester then provided an update on the Los Banos Creek Reservoir project noting receipt of U.S. Fish & Wildlife’s consultation letter which will be incorporated in the Draft EA/IS that should be out for public draft later in December.

The Executive Director reported that the Phase 2 drilling was completed on November 15<sup>th</sup>, and the process was reviewed by the Department of Safety of Dams (DOSD) staff who gave it a thumbs up.

Next, Executive Director White explained that the DPCR Participation Agreement has been approved by each of the member entity boards other than CCC who plan to take action on the matter later this month. He said that the current draft included in the Board packet incorporates changes proposed by CCC and recommends approval contingent on CCC’s approval. A motion was made by Director Fontana and seconded by Director Stearns to approve the DPCR Participation Agreement contingent on approval by the CCC Board. The motion was unanimously carried. Following CCC’s approval, Mr. White said that a Standing Committee would be formed, and the first meeting scheduled to move forward with the DPCR project issues and budget.

**WATER TRANSFER PROGRAM:**

The Executive Director provided background information leading up to the development of the two-year agreement with San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Authority (SLDMWA) and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. An outline of the allocation split, and pricing was provided. Mr. White then recommended that the member entity boards act on the draft agreement before the Exchange Contractors' Board takes action in January.

A motion was made by Director Nickel and seconded by Director Stearns to have each of the member entity boards act on the draft agreement and bring it back to the Exchange Contractors' Board in January for their consideration. The motion was unanimously carried.

**BAY-DELTA WATER QUALITY AND REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD (RWOCB) REPORT:**

Consultant David Cory reported on the December 7<sup>th</sup> State Water Resources Control Board workshop relating to the Management Zone Implementation Plans (MZIPs), noting that staff seemed to understand the issues. He next reviewed discussions held at the December 5<sup>th</sup> San Joaquin Valley Drainage Authority's (SJVDA) meeting in preparation of the anticipated Notice to Comply from the Regional Board to be sent out in late December. The SJVDA is in a Priority 2 basin under the Management Zones, and they continue to work with the Valley Water Collaborative (VWC) to help organize, create, and administer a nitrate management zone on the Westside of the San Joaquin River. Coordination among other groups who are required to address the nitrate challenge has begun to meet the regulatory deadlines of the Regional Board's Nitrate Control Program.

**LEGISLATIVE REPORT:**

The Executive Director referred to the State and Federal Lobbyist's reports included in the Board packets and provided a brief summary. In conclusion, he stated a trip back to Washington DC is being planned to meet with legislatures and staff.

**PUBLIC OUTREACH:**

Mr. White said he is working with Lighthouse Public Affairs on a spreadsheet of activities moving forward and intends to bring it back to the Board.

**CHARITABLE CONTRIBUTIONS:**

The Executive Director said the Board has asked staff to investigate the opportunity to make contributions to local disadvantaged communities or for other local community needs using funds generated from the water transfer program. After some discussion and legal counsel guidance, staff was given direction to come up with the proposed structure and implementation of the process.

**ATTORNEY'S REPORT:**

Attorney Andrew McClure reported on three items in litigation which included the City of Fresno Oral Argument hearing in front of the Court of Appeal for the Federal Circuit that was scheduled on December 7th. The second update was regarding the Court's decision on the California Sportsfishing Protection Alliance (CSPA) Groundwater cases in Merced County Superior Court. Lastly, an update on the Del Puerto Canyon Reservoir CEQA litigation was provided.

**FOUR ENTITIES' MANAGER REPORTS:**

**Central California Irrigation District:** Manager Martin reported on the completion of the maintenance work done at Mendota Dam, commending CCID's personnel on completing the project within the one-week time frame that had been determined in coordination with the Natural Marines Fisheries Service (NMFS). He provided some details of the issues found and repairs completed. Additional work on the dam's deck still needs to be completed but will have no effect on water operations.

**San Luis Canal Company:** Manager Wiersma provided highlights of activities at the gate installation project at Sack Dam which is currently on schedule. He shared his appreciation to the SLCC shareholders, Grassland Water District and other agencies who voluntarily agreed to curtail their water in order for them to complete the project at this time.

**Firebaugh Canal Water District:** Manager Bryant said that FCWD had higher than average water deliveries in November with some pre-irrigation. They will run through Christmas and then shut down for winter maintenance.

**Columbia Canal Company:** Manager Gardner reported that CCC delivered about 2,400 AF in November and shut down their system on November 19<sup>th</sup> for winter maintenance.

**INFORMATIONAL:**

Executive Director White referred to the information about the upcoming Water Users Conference in Reno and said that staff will be scheduling project tours within the next couple of months in response to discussions with various agencies during the recent ACWA Conference.

Before adjourning the meeting to Closed Session, Chair Cardella expressed his appreciation to the Board and staff for their time with issues and projects throughout the year.

**CLOSED SESSION:**

The meeting was adjourned to Closed Session and a short recess was called at 10:12 a.m. The meeting was reconvened to Closed Session at 10:25 a.m.

Chair Cardella returned the meeting to Open Session at 10:55 a.m. and reported that direction was provided to Legal Counsel and staff.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:55 a.m.

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CHRIS CARDELLA, CHAIR

Attest a true record of proceedings had  
And taken at the foregoing meeting, our  
Presence thereat and our consent thereto.

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CHRIS WHITE, SECRETARY

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ERIC FONTANA, DIRECTOR

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JAMES L. NICKEL, DIRECTOR

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MIKE STEARNS, VICE-CHAIR