



# VALLEY LAND ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER

**OUR MISSION IS TO EDUCATE AND BUILD ALLIANCES TO PROTECT OUR UNIQUELY PRODUCTIVE CALIFORNIA CENTRAL VALLEY FARMLAND**

**WINTER 2019**

Valleylandalliance.org [facebook.com/valleylandalliance](https://facebook.com/valleylandalliance) [vallylandalliance209@gmail.com](mailto:vallylandalliance209@gmail.com) (209)756-2421

## YEAR IN REVIEW by Jean Okuye

As the days get shorter and the weather cools, we look back over the past year and give thanks for friends, family, good harvests, and our many blessings. Our nonprofit, Valley Land Alliance, VLA, with a mission to save farmland, continues to be at the table, giving thanks for our ability to reach out to many and educate. Thanks for your support.

This past year we awarded our 5th scholarship to a University of California, Merced student with interests related to environmental stability, water accessibility and agricultural land protection. We developed a coloring book specific to our area to teach about water, healthy soils and agricultural products we produced and processed locally. With these materials we reached more than 2,000 people at the Merced County Fair, in schools, at the Golden Valley Parents' Institute and at the Merced County Farm Bureau Farm2U day for county 3rd graders.

Partnering with Natural Resource Conservation District, Farm Bureau, East Merced Resource Conservation District, Merced Sierra Club, California Climate

and Agriculture Network and others provides an opportunity to work together on common issues to bring positive changes to our world.

VLA has attended monthly meetings of the Merced County Association of Governments, MCAG, as a member of the advisory committee to the governing board, made up of representatives from the six incorporated cities and five supervisor districts. VLA also has a seat on the oversight committee for the use of the ½ cent sales tax, Measure V funds. Comments to governing bodies regarding our interest in protecting land, air and water have been recorded. We have commented on the draft Sustainable Groundwater Plan due January, 2020.

This plan, which has a goal to reach sustainable groundwater use by 2040, will require people working together or the State regulating groundwater use.

With Merced City discussing adding 50% more land to their city, VLA will be at the table encouraging infill and compact development to save resources and money for everyone. We will continue in the new year to support efforts to protect our natural resources and to save farmland. Please join us in protecting our quality of life.

# Water Myths of the San Joaquin Valley

by Eric Caine

original article taken from the Valley Citizen

Among the more persistent myths about water in the San Joaquin Valley, none is more durable than the canard that water shortages and land subsidence have been caused by, “an innumerable myriad of Endangered Species Act-related laws, mandates, opinions, rulings and settlements.” This latest addition to the catalogue of misinformation comes from Kristi Diener, in an OP/ED for the *Modesto and Fresno Bee* newspapers.



**Subsidence**

Diener, like everyone else who attempts to blame water shortages and subsidence on a “regulatory drought” runs into a logical *cul-de-sac* when she has to admit that “subsidence did not begin in 2014’s drought. It was an issue at least a century before.” But if, as Diener says, environmental regulations are just a little over “two-and-a-half decades” in effect, what could have caused subsidence prior to the punitive effects of regulation?

The answer is simple: Overdrafting groundwater caused the subsidence. Who overdrafted the groundwater? Farmers and ranchers. Nothing complex here, but apologists for overuse of public resources really don’t like simple and obvious answers—that’s why they’re always trying to find ways around them.

Diener rightly argues that using surface water is far preferable to pumping groundwater, but wrongly concludes that reductions in surface water allocations for Valley farmers have left farmers with no choice but to pump groundwater. Fact is, farmers in the southern San Joaquin Valley have been overdrafting groundwater since they drained Tulare Lake, at one time the largest freshwater lake west of the Mississippi—they’ve been overdrafting groundwater since they used up the Kern and San Joaquin Rivers decades ago.

Diener writes that reduced allocations have been due to regulatory barriers without pointing out the allocations to farmers from the Central Valley Project and State Water project are based on **contractual rights**.



Contractual rights, also known as, “paper water,” are distinguished from “appropriative rights,” which are rights bestowed by the state decades back in the 20th century. **Appropriative rights**, most often as pre- or post-1914, carry far more legal authority than contractual rights because the contractual rights specify that allocations are based on yearly abundance and the state or federal government’s discretion.

### ***San Joaquin River: water by court order; photo by Josh Uecker***

***order; photo by Josh Uecker***

Anyone with even a cursory knowledge of the history of irrigated agriculture in the San Joaquin Valley is familiar with the iconic photograph of USGS scientist Joe Poland showing the degree of land subsidence near Mendota from 1925 to 1977, well before effects from the Endangered Species Act could have affected water use in the Valley. Diener claims that without water from northern California, farmers have been “forced” to pump groundwater. Fact is, they were “forced” to pump groundwater well before they started begging state and federal governments for even more water from up north, though “forced” is hardly an appropriate term when discussing the calculated risks all businesspeople must make before investing time and money.

Diverting water from the Central Valley’s major rivers, especially the Sacramento and San Joaquin, has wreaked environmental destruction in the San Joaquin Delta, decimated salmon runs, negatively impacted California fisheries, and had devastating effects on wetlands and wildlife throughout the Valley. In many places, intensive irrigation has also poisoned the soil, most notably in the scandalous case of the [Kesterson National Wildlife Refuge](#).

According to Mark Arax in *The Dreamt Land*, farmers have increased irrigated acreage during every drought since the 1920s. Even during the drought of 2014-15, agribusinesses like Kern County’s Paramount Farms [added over 70,000 acres of farmland](#) to their already extensive holdings of pistachios, almonds and walnuts. Adding acres of farmland and then begging the government for a water fix isn’t much different from speculating on a widget boom and then asking the government to buy up your overproduction. No one has ever forced farmers to pump groundwater. Instead, they’ve kept adding irrigated acreage whenever they could because they figured they could count on government bailing them out. It’s almost as though they think we’re a socialist economy.

# OUR WATER THOUGHTS...

"I am a newcomer and only know snippets, which can be helpful and/or a hindrance. I've noticed that no one really wants to bring up "privatised water" and especially if the owners are in the room. So, it gets neglected. It seems too, that the state of CA through the **Sustainable Groundwater Management Act**, is delegating policy to local governments. Well, that is democratic, and perhaps the way to go, but can the counties take on privatised water, and the wealth these owners have to back them?"

-Ursula Stock

"It is obvious the demand for water exceeds the water supply in San Joaquin Valley and southern California and as Dr. David Cehrs, a water scientist, states: there is a disconnect between politics, political reality and science; with the only way to fix our water imbalance is to lower our water demand. There is a finite amount of water"

-Jean Okuye

## WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS?

VISIT OUR WEBSITE  
and  
LET US KNOW

VISIT THE VALLEY  
CITIZEN WEBSITE



*Planning and Conservation League*

# WHAT IS MCAG?

by Ursula Stock



*Merced County Association of Governments*

"Merced County Association of Governments (MCAG) is an association of city and county governments, with members who meet to solve regional problems such as transportation, solid waste, and air quality." The 11-member MCAG Governing Board includes a supervisor from each of the five county districts and an elected official from each of the six incorporated cities in Merced County: Atwater, Dos Palos, Gustine, Livingston, Los Banos and Merced.

As a regional collaborative agency, MCAG serves in a number of transportation planning roles in Merced County based on local, state and federal designations. These designations offer increased funding for MCAG activities, primarily in transportation planning for the unincorporated areas of Merced County. " (Quoted from the MCAG website) As a member of the Citizens Advisory Committee, I explored their website to learn more about them. What I found was educational, useful to the public and user-friendly. I highly recommend you go to their recycling page where they clearly say what they can and cannot process.

Check out the Yarts page to find an inexpensive and relaxing way to access some of our local natural wonders. Yarts is a bus service connecting Yosemite with Merced, Fresno, Mammoth Lakes and Sonora: their Merced-Yosemite round trip price is only \$32 per person- includes park entrance fee and there are many free days each year!!! Yarts will take bicycles, and they will drop you off on route for a lesser fare. I saw a couple taking their bikes to Cathey's Valley, with the intention of riding back roads to Merced for a day's outing. The Bus, offers transportation around the city and beyond as affordable alternatives to driving your car. They are interested in hearing from you! Submit your comment or request online. You can visit MCAG at <http://www.mcagov.org/>.

# CALIFORNIA FARMLAND TRUST STORY ON JEAN OKUYE



## "You Work Together"

Not only is the giving season upon us, we have a tremendous story of a family coming together in the hardest of times and keeping the farm despite it all. Read Jean Okuye's story and then watch the full video of her story in her own words. \*

<http://cafarmtrust.org/okuye/>

\*Excerpt and pictures from CA FARMLAND TRUST'S FALL 2019 LEGACY NEWSLETTER

# HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

Enjoy local fruits and nuts  
this holiday.



*A stray jewel in our Valley found near  
Merced River by Scott Magneson.*

*"IF YOU TAKE CARE OF THE BIRDS YOU TAKE CARE  
OF MOST OF THE BIG PROBLEMS IN THE WORLD."*

*-Thomas Lovejoy*

Visit our website at  
**Valleylandalliance.org**

we accept donations online through  
**Paypal!**

Become a member of Valley Land Alliance today!

Membership donations are:

\$35 Membership

\$100 Family

\$  Other

Checks can be mailed to:

**RETURN ADDRESS:**

Valley Land Alliance  
PO Box 102  
Cressey, CA 95312