



Valley Land Alliance NEWSLETTER

Our Mission is to educate and build alliances to protect our uniquely productive California Central Valley Farmland

SUMMER 2020

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(209) 756 2421

Letter from the President

June, 2020

Greetings from the top of our watershed, Yosemite!

“If there is magic on this planet, it is contained in water”.

This is our theme for this newsletter.

Water comes from the sky, travels to streams, rivers, and lakes, down into the ground and is moved by canals to supply all of us (many places in) California.

Camping in the Sierra Nevada mountains recently, I watched a rushing stream, then drove over the canal which takes water from these mountains to Los Angeles more than 200 miles away. We found only one small patch

of snow near the summit for the kids to play in, and I realized every drop from the sky is necessary for the survival of all living species including me.

Jean Okuye



Mostly dry Owens Lake, a testament to early California water wars, is now the biggest source of dust pollution in the entire United States. On the right is the Los Angeles aqueduct nearby moving water south from streams and lakes, when , not so long ago, water was naturally there.

VLA IN ACTION

Although the pandemic has been front page, VLA has been watching and making comments on (other happenings) such as water, high speed rail (HSR), healthy soils, urban planning updates The Del Puerto Canyon proposed dam ,which is still being considered, is located in a seismic active area similar to the Pacheco Pass San Luis Reservoir area. VLA has expressed concerns during the public comment period. Seismic damage to PP dam has been estimated to cost 1 billion \$ to repair. Another plan VLA has made public comment on, is the high speed rail plans from Merced to San Jose. Where is the protection for movement of wildlife and preservation of agriculture? VLA was recently approached by consultants to comment on the update of the general plan for Livingston City. Merced City's proposed plan to increase its footprint by 50% is being monitored.

CONGRATULATIONS!

Scholarship Recipient- Omnya Elhag

Applied Mathematics Graduate Student at CSU Long Beach



Omnya is a recent graduate of UC Merced who plans on continuing her education at Long Beach State.

Omnya wrote; “ Choosing to attend UC Merced was both sheer luck and a perfect match. I was raised in Sudan, North Africa, typically around open land and many farm animals. While I didn't quite understand it well, I was always interested in the environment. Growing up where I did showed me different environmental aspects, like how the weather changed from one year to the next, different types of vegetations growing in the same place, or different animals appearing at different times of the year. After moving to the

United States, California, in 2012, I started to be even more interested in the environment and how different it was from where I grew up. Even then, I did not get a clear understanding or experience of what the environment really is until I attended UC Merced. Here, I was exposed to the most detailed and interesting knowledge about ecology, water quality, and most recently, the ecosystems of California. Learning about the different climates, animals, biomes, etc. in California was truly fascinating, and it was all around us. Working in a research lab investigating mercury- contaminated waters in CA reservoirs during my third and beginning of the fourth year opened up my interest in water quality and its impacts on the environment around it. As an Applied Mathematics major with an emphasis on Earth System Sciences, I believe my degree will help me pursue my interest in researching water quality in general, specifically in California and the central valley since the impact is much higher in this area.”

WELCOME NEW BOARD MEMBER- Trevor Hutton



Trevor Hutton grew up in Modesto, but spent the summers working on his family's sweet potato, peach, and almond farm in Livingston. After completing studies in music at the UNiversity of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, he ended up working for an ag biotech firm in the poultry industry for nine years before returning to the family farm in 2014. Trevor first became involved in issues surrounding environmental sustainability in college as a member of

the UNC renewable energy special projects committee. In his spare time, Trevor enjoys live music performances, cooking and playing board games.

Where is the water going?



We asked three people in the valley, “If you had a magic wand, how would you solve California’s water problem?”



Merced County Supervisor Lloyd Pareira-

Merced County, along with the rest of California, faces a daunting challenge over the next 20 years, bringing our groundwater basins into balance. While there is no one-size-fits-all solution, I believe two key elements to achieving this goal are going to be access to and storage of additional surface water and a collaborative spirit amongst water users to work together on solutions.

Only by capturing additional surface water through flood flows and innovative projects will we be able to recharge our groundwater. Surface water in lieu of groundwater during wet years provides the opportunity for recovery of our groundwater aquifers and allows that resource to be available when the next drought comes. Many of our water districts recognize the value of flood flows and are already pursuing these options.

Merced County’s farmers and ranchers are innovative and forwarding thinking stewards of the land and water. Working together to pursue projects that increase conservation and recharge the groundwater, will be essential to the survival of our agricultural economy and jobs. Over the past four years water users in Merced County have been collaboratively working together developing plans and goals to sustainably manage our groundwater. This history sets us on the right path toward achieving sustainability and protecting our important agricultural economy. <https://www.co.merced.ca.us/>

Merced County Farm Bureau ED Breanne Ramos-



Water is a difficult topic to discuss as the issues impacting availability and accessibility are not one item, but several items. The question of how one would fix our water woes if given a magic wand can also be looked at with a wide lenses I do not believe there to be a single way. Surface water, recharge basins, greater storage capabilities, increased knowledge of water usage amongst all individuals are all ways in which we can solve California's water problem. These are also coupled with legislation that needs to benefit all involved - municipalities, environment, and agriculture - and not place one against the other.

“We’re in this together” has been a phrase that has been used often

this year in relation to the ongoing battle with novel coronavirus and it should be the case for water as well.

<https://www.mercedfarmbureau.org>

Lois Henry, CEO of SJV water



"People will call me an anarchist, or the anti-Christ, or both, but I think California will have to confront its arcane water rights and permitting systems before being able to institute any wide scale attempts at open water markets or substandard land retirement programs. We will also need to think more regionally around natural watersheds, which is difficult when basin boundaries are drawn to political county lines rather than how water actually moves. Environmental and farming groups will have to join together to find innovative ways for ag to continue alongside enhanced and protected ecosystems. And Central Valley towns and cities absolutely must get on board with mandatory conservation and new development standards that don't include a quarter acre, English-manor inspired water-sucking lawn."

<https://sjvwater.org>

VLA is grateful for the support from the John and Nancy Cassidy Family Foundation, an advised fund of Silicon Valley Community Foundation.. We also wish to thank all of you who have supported us with memberships and contributions which make it possible to educate many people and policy makers in our community.* **THANK YOU!**

**“Plans focus
mainly on
increasing water
supplies to
end overdraft,
but the
numbers
do not
add up”**

**PPIC Review of SJV Groundwater Sustainability Plans,
May 2020** reported by Ursula Stock

The Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan think tank. They are dedicated to informing and improving public policy in California through independent, objective, nonpartisan research. <https://www.ppic.org/about-ppic/>

On May 21st, PPIC offered a virtual event: “Review of SJV Groundwater Sustainability Plans”. For those of you not familiar with SGMA, here is a brief description drawn from the Department of Water Resources website, which is also listed below.

The [Sustainable Groundwater Management Act \(SGMA\)](#) established a new structure for managing California’s groundwater resources by local agencies. To implement SGMA, over 260 Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) have been formed in the state’s 140+ [high- and medium-priority basins](#).

The planning deadline for California’s first round of [Groundwater Sustainability Plan \(GSPs\)](#) was

January 31, 2020, for basins subject to [critical conditions of overdraft](#), and January 31, 2022, for all other high- and medium-priority basins.

<https://water.ca.gov/Programs/Groundwater-Management/SGMA-Groundwater-Management/Groundwater-Sustainable-Agencies>

Eleven critically overdrafted basins are in the SJ Valley, covering most of the valley floor. PPIC took a “big picture” review of the 36 plans submitted for these 11 basins, looking at how what solutions they propose to end overdraft and how they address two of the undesirable effects of groundwater overdraft that SGMA requires: lowering ground water levels, which can cause wells to go dry, and land subsidence, which can damage critical infrastructure.

PPIC reports that while the plans reflect major effort, several problems still need to be addressed. ***Plans focus mainly on increasing water supplies to end overdraft, but the numbers do not add up. For example, the total recharge claimed in all the GSPs is over 2x what is possible.*** Most plans do not yet address demand management, but **reducing water use will need to be part of the solution.** Finally, **many plans do not adequately address undesirable results, including continued land subsidence and dry drinking water wells.** PPIC recommends more regional coordination of GSPs to achieve sustainability, and more attention to undesirable results of overdraft. More information is available here:

<https://www.ppic.org/blog/video-a-review-of-san-joaquin-valley-groundwater-sustainability-plans/>

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Groundwater level monitoring, Kelly M. Grow / California Department of Water Resources.
See article on page 5.