

Statement by Tulare County Supervisor Allen Ishida
Subcommittee on Water and Power
Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
May 3, 2007

My name is Allen Ishida, a third generation citrus grower in the Lindsay – Strathmore area and the Chairman of the Tulare County Board of Supervisors. I have spent over 20 years in the commercial real estate business selling farm and subdivision properties in California before returning to our family farm. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you to provide my perspective of the San Joaquin River Settlement.

Let me begin by saying that this settlement threatens to turn back the clock on an economic and environmental decision that was deliberately made by your predecessors to address regional water reliability. Therefore, the legislation being debated today represents a significant departure from the seventy years of public policy that created the most productive agricultural region in the world. Let me also say that I do not oppose the efforts of the settling parties to resolve the San Joaquin River dispute. I believe the restoration of the river is a noble goal.

The original lands my family began farming were once dry land barley fields. My father, uncles and grandfather developed this land into citrus because of the availability of the new surface water from the Friant Dam and the micro climate that is ideal for citrus. The citrus industry in Tulare County is now a 500 million dollar business. Our original properties are still solely reliant on the surface water provided by Friant because the underground water is not available in sufficient quantities. My family and I felt confident in the federal government's implied promise to continue supplying water. We therefore have invested our future in farming. During the 1970's and 80's, with my father and brother, we purchased additional lands that had available underground water. Whatever shortfall in water delivery from the San Joaquin River Settlement, we will hopefully be able to make up the difference by pumping from the underground aquifer.

The previous statement is from my perspective as a farmer. My perspective as an elected official in one of the fastest growing regions in California and my experience in the commercial real estate profession is very different. I am very aware of the negative impact pumping water from the under ground aquifer will have on the future development and quality of life in my county and neighboring counties. This settlement has a far greater impact on more than 400,000 Tulare County residents who were not direct participants to this settlement. Tulare County's population is projected to increase to over 600,000 in the next 20 years. The future of our county will depend on the quality and quantity of water available to our residents.

One of the main reasons for building the Friant Dam was to secure an additional water supply to address ground water depletion due to pumping water for agricultural and domestic uses, which resulted in the 1920's and 1930's. The new surface water provided by Friant reduced the depletion of our underground water. However, this situation is not static, and the demand for water to meet the growing demands of urban, agricultural and environmental uses in the San Joaquin Valley now means that the Valley currently experiences a water supply deficit of 1.1 million acre-feet in an average year, and 2.6 million acre feet in a drought year. This deficit will grow if the Settlement is adopted as proposed with out any mitigation plan for water supply losses. These numbers show that we need additional surface water, not less.

In fact, I call your attention to three studies from the Northwest Economic Associates, University of California, and Friant Water Users Authority that came to the conclusion that ground water levels would nearly double in depth and pumping costs would significantly increase as a result of the water releases required in the Settlement. According to the studies, there would be serious economic impacts to the region due to the loss of jobs and the reduction of agricultural production.

“MR. CHAIRMAN, I REQUEST THAT THESE THREE STUDIES BE PLACED IN THE HEARING RECORD”

Providing water in the quantity and quality to our communities is one of the major challenges we are currently facing in Tulare County. We have significant water quality issues with saline and nitrate levels above California State water quality standards.

“MR. CHAIRMAN, I REQUEST THAT I MAY ADD A SET OF 10 LAND USE AND WELL TESTING MAPS TO THE HEARING RECORD.”

For example, the City of Lindsay (population 11,000), which receives approximately 60% of its water from Friant, had to locate its supplement water well 3 miles outside of the city limits because of water quality. We currently are looking for new well sites for several of our unincorporated communities whose water quality does not meet state standards. The result of these proposed water releases from the Settlement will have a significant negative environmental impact on our communities. The potential increased overdraft of our underground water table will further decrease our water quality.

“MR. CHAIRMAN, I REQUEST THAT I MAY ADD 12 TULARE COUNTY CITY RESOLUTIONS, THREE TULARE AND KERN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS RESOLUTIONS, 1 NEWSPAPER ARTICLE AND 5 LETTERS FROM CONCERNED CITIZEN GROUPS TO BE PLACED IN THE RECORD.”

In closing, I must emphasize that any changes to water deliveries from the Friant Dam, absent mitigation, will undermine the very foundation of economic success and prosperity in the Central Valley. A promise to mitigate the loss of surface water from the San Joaquin River Settlement is not adequate for my constituents. We are asking for concrete mitigation language in the implementation legislation.

Thank you for this opportunity to express our concerns.