



IRRIGATION NEWSLETTER

District Water Master Plan Moving Forward

On July 30, the District held a second Grower Advisory Committee (GAC) meeting for its Water Master Plan (WMP). The WMP is SSJID's ongoing effort to set direction and priorities on capital infrastructure projects and water resource actions that meet service, water rights protection, conservation, and financial and environmental sustainability goals. The meeting was held both virtually and at the City of Ripon Council Chambers (to comply with social distancing guidelines), included District staff, the Board of Directors, and a group of approximately 20 SSJID growers. The purpose of the meeting presentation was to update the GAC and seek feedback on two WMP topics: (1) Potential future infrastructure alternatives, presented by Engineering Department Manager Forrest Killingsworth (2) Financial state of the District, presented by Assistant General Manager Bere Lindley

The presented infrastructure alternatives were developed by spending countless hours with division managers to identify the best way to modernize the District. The time spent in these meetings and the input from the operations staff has proved to be extremely valuable to the WMP process. Along with the infrastructure discussion, Bere Lindley reviewed the financial state of the District, including potential risks for reduced hydropower revenue in the future due to energy market conditions.

The WMP development team is currently working on Phase 2 of a three-phase process. **Phase 1** (initial assessment) was completed in late 2018. The current **Phase 2** process consists of the technical work needed to produce the WMP document itself, and purposely includes stakeholder outreach to assure that the plan meets the long-term needs of our customers. **Phase 3** will develop a Programmatic Environmental Impact Report that will be necessary to implement the capital improvement projects identified in the final WMP.

The next step in Phase 2 is preparing for GAC Meeting #3, which is tentatively scheduled to occur in December. In the meantime, the District is making significant progress on the Water Master Plan in the following areas:

- Proposed future uses of the District's water resources, considering land use changes, regulatory needs, and customer preferences
- Development of comprehensive WMP alternatives involving: the preferred infrastructure approach, possible water management decisions (like water transfers or annexations), and financial impacts (including potential impacts to rates)
- Financial feasibility in refinement of WMP alternatives

The District is expected to complete the planning effort in 2021. For those interested in hearing more about the project or to provide their input, please contact Forrest Killingsworth, SSJID Engineering Department Manager, at (209) 249-4620 or fkillingsworth@ssjid.com.

Successful Irrigation Season Scheduled to End October 15

As harvest season begins to wind down, and the summer heat begins to give way to cooler temperatures, we look forward to the end of the irrigation season. The timing of harvest generally foretells the end of the irrigation season. At its September 24 board meeting, the SSJID Board of Directors set the end of the season for October 15. Water will be available until 5 PM that day. The October 15 date will be necessary this year to allow SSJID to perform important inspection and maintenance at Woodward Reservoir this fall. Please communicate with your division managers to assure one final irrigation for the year. We want to thank you for another successful irrigation season and hope that fall brings you rest, and more time to enjoy family and friends.

SSJID's Powered by Purpose Public Education Plan Mailer Generates Much Interest

The South San Joaquin Irrigation District has launched a public education effort named Powered by Purpose, in response to public requests for updates about SSJID's effort to replace PG&E as the local retail electric power provider for Manteca, Escalon, Ripon and the surrounding areas. As part of the educational campaign, we recently mailed a postcard to all households and businesses within our service territory introducing them to our new Powered by Purpose website at PoweredbySSJID.com. The new website is dedicated to informing folks of our progress and introducing our project to those who are not familiar with our plan to provide public power to our communities.

The postcard has generated a lot of interest from those who already know us, and from those who have not heard about our plan. Questions have ranged from "Will I still get the CARE discount (for qualified low-income residents) that PG&E provides" to "How will my current solar contract be handled if SSJID takes over" and "WHEN?" To our delight, it has allowed us to interact with our stakeholders about this project as we confirm our long-term commitment to reduce rates, increase safety and provide accountability when it comes to delivering electricity.

Powered by Purpose is intended to build awareness and understanding of SSJID's 16-year quest to become the locally owned and operated power provider within its boundary. Recently, SSJID has offered to pay \$116 million for the local assets of PG&E, who filed for bankruptcy protection in January 2019 and faced up to \$35 billion in unfunded liabilities related to California wildfires in 2017 and 2018.

The Powered by Purpose website features details about SSJID's offer, including information about the economic benefits to the communities, a history of the project and answers to frequently asked questions.

One question important to our growers is "How will the new electric utility affect existing irrigation services?" The short answer is, "It won't." The irrigation and electric utilities will be financially and operationally independent. Rates of neither enterprise will be subsidized by rates of the other. The electric utility will have its own assistant general manager. There will be separate engineering and operations departments for the irrigation and electric utilities departments. Efficiencies will be realized in support services such as fleet management and administrative functions.

To catch up on this important effort to improve our community, please visit the following links:

Powered by Purpose website:
PoweredBySSJID.com

Linkedin:
linkedin.com/company/ssjid

Facebook:
facebook.com/poweredbypurpose/

Fall/Winter Construction and Maintenance Projects



Now that the irrigation season is nearly over, SSJID's canals will be dry and our crews shift into the construction and maintenance season. As always, we use this time to repair and replace facilities, and build new projects for our system. Here is a snapshot of the most significant projects we hope to accomplish before the 2021 irrigation season begins.

Control Box Pour-Over Wall Modification Project

We will be modifying 22 existing control boxes throughout the District by cutting the internal wall in the box and installing aluminum rails and slides. The purpose of the project is to make our control boxes more versatile to deliver water to sprinkler customers while lessening pressure on our pipelines.

Float Valve Projects

We will be installing four additional float valves at various locations in the District which include the Lateral I, Lateral R180dd, Lateral We, and Lateral Ja. These automated devices regulate downstream water levels on pipelines and are used at dead-end laterals. These mechanical devices improve operational efficiency to deliver to sprinkler customers as well as decreasing pressure on our pipelines. A design improvement will be implemented which includes substituting the float valve box with a steel vent which will limit the footprint and improve the flow rates through the devices.

Lateral R Automated Trash Screen at the MDC

Last year the District installed an automated trash screen at the Van Groningen Reservoir. This season, crews will install an automated trash screen at the Lateral R takeout at the MDC. These devices improve water quality to downstream customers by removing trash and debris.

Woodward Outlet Tower Rehabilitation & Improvements

Staff is currently working with engineering consultants to assess and rehabilitate the District's 100+ year old Woodward Outlet Tower. Over the decades, the tower has experienced degradation and corrosion to the mechanical equipment as well as the concrete structure and cat walk. This winter, the District will solicit bids and implement Phase 1 improvements, which include repairing the areas of degraded concrete and corroded rebar. Phase 2 is anticipated in the summer of 2021 and includes structural repair, and mechanical upgrades and automation.

Automated Control Gate Installations

District crews will install nine automated gates throughout the District this season. These automated gates help maintain a downstream level on a pipeline with a downstream level sensor and can also provide flow control which helps conserve water and improve operational efficiency. This project includes the modification of two control boxes and two headwalls to accommodate the installations.

Ditch Lining and Shotcrete Repair

The District plans to perform shotcrete repairs to 3,400 feet of the canal liner on the Lateral R Ditch, concrete cracks on the face of the Woodward Dam, concrete cracks at the Lateral V Ditch, and perennial repairs along the Joint Supply Canal downstream of Goodwin Dam.

Ensuring Financial Sustainability at SSJID

As we reported in our last newsletter to you, irrigation water charges have been almost flat for the last 24 years. This is both good news and bad news. It is good for our customers that the cost of irrigation water has been stable and low for so long. Few other irrigation districts provide their customers with such a low cost and dependable water supply. We at SSJID are proud of this. However, the costs to provide reliable and quality irrigation service continues to increase, growing nearly 70 percent since 2008.

SSJID's irrigation rate revenues are lower than the cost to provide service. SSJID has been able to subsidize irrigation service for decades with other, non-rate (non-operating) income such as Tri-Dam hydroelectric power sales and occasional large water transfers, without endangering the supply to our irrigators. Some of this non-rate income may be lower in the future. Today, SSJID is still able to subsidize irrigation rates, and will be able to continue charging irrigation customers less than the cost of service for as far as we can see into the future. However, costs grow with inflation, government mandates and regulations, and efforts to maintain and improve the quality of service. As a result, the operating loss, and the required subsidy for irrigation rates, increases every year as irrigation income has remained mostly flat. If this were to continue indefinitely, it would eventually become a problem, first for SSJID, and ultimately for our farmers.

We take seriously our responsibility to you as our customer to keep you informed and anticipate possible cost increases. As we continue to plan the future of SSJID in our Water Master Plan, we are committed to operating in a manner that appropriately considers the needs and resources of our customers. One of our goals is to continue to provide excellent value to our customers. Another is to ensure the financial sustainability of SSJID. We will only be looking at projects and expenses that increase overall cost efficiency and will provide service improvements that customers will be willing to pay for, or that are required by law. We will also be considering how much irrigation rates may need to rise in the future. Finally, we will also explore opportunities for additional non-rate revenues to maintain or increase the funds available to subsidize irrigation rates.

Billing reminder

As the 2020 irrigation season approaches its end, we would like to remind customers of our billing policy. As a convenience to our customers, we do not require payment for monthly volumetric fees until balances exceed \$10; however, all balances are due after your final water delivery season, even if the balance due is less than \$10. Customers with a balance due will not be eligible to receive water deliveries in 2021 until the balance is paid.

Also, SSJID offers an online payment option. Since the main office has been closed to the public and walk-in bill payments are not allowed at this time due to COVID-19 safety measures, we encourage customers who have not taken advantage of this option to do so now. Simply go online to ssjid.com and visit our Home page. There you will find "Manage Your Account," followed by "Billing." Follow the directions to create your account and it's just a short wait to receive an email verifying that you're now ready to utilize the online payment system.

Questions? Please call (209) 249-4610.

