



Farmington groundwater program gets funding boost

By Craig W. Anderson

The Farmington Groundwater Recharge Program will receive additional federal funding via a House appropriations bill submitted by U.S. Representatives Richard Pombo and Dennis Cardoza.

San Joaquin County's overdraft of the groundwater basin is estimated to be 2 million acre-feet.

However, the original \$1.5 million requested has been reduced to \$1 million, according to Bret Ladine, Cardoza's press secretary.

"The funds are included in the Energy and Water Appropriations bill, specifically the conference report of the bill, the final version that hammers out the differences between the House and Senate versions," he said. "It still must pass both houses of Congress again and the president must sign it. We expect it to be passed."

Although this appropriation has been reduced, it still brings to nearly \$3 million the additional federal funding approved by Congress since 2002. The project is the largest direct groundwater recharge project in the area since 1993.

Stockton East Water District is leading the \$33.5 million program in partnership with the Sacramento District U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to restore the region's groundwater supply and drive back saline water intrusion by spreading an annual average of 35,000 acre-feet of water over 800 to 1,200 acres of land.

Most of the program's \$33.5 million cost will come from the federal government.

Land will be acquired through short-and long-term agreements with landowners during the 7 to 10-year window for the program. The anticipated appropriation will be used to help procure the acreage needed for the recharge program.

"Without water, crops and communities wither and struggle to survive," Pombo said. "Through this investment in the Farmington Groundwater Recharge Program, Eastern San Joaquin County continues its mission to restore an underground resource in chronic overdraft."

"This is long overdue. We're really one of the last areas to do something about groundwater recharging," said Paul Sanguinetti, a SJFB and SEWD board member. "We don't need any more studies. This has been studied to death. Until we put the first gallon of water in the ground, we're not doing anything."

The program seeks to rotate water with other land uses and may develop permanent recharge facilities. The acreage is within a general area bordered by Jack Tone Road on the east, Highway 99 to the west, the Mokelumne River in the north and Temple Creek in the south.

"Saline intrusion is a major problem and it has to be reduced," said Kevin Kauffman, SEWD general manager. "Everyone will benefit from higher water table levels and a more reliable water supply. Also, growers will save on energy costs because they won't have to pump from as deep a water table."

Kauffman said the Army Corps of Engineers, water districts and other agencies are "working as a real team, preserving open space not only for farming but for groundwater recharging. It's like growing another crop."

The first phase of the program has been completed with the construction of three percolation ponds near SEWD headquarters. The facility includes a 19-acre pond and three recharge basins, each totaling 35 acres, with annual recharge capabilities estimated at 7,000 acre-feet. An estimated six-inches of water will percolate into the ground per day from each pond.

“In the past, the Corps of Engineers focused most of its resources on design and construction of flood control projects,” said Lt. Co. Mark W. Connelly, USACE acting Sacramento division engineer. “The Farmington program is an example of where we are partnering with communities and water districts to complete their environmental infrastructure improvement projects.”

“This 60-acre facility is the first of several steps for the Farmington Program,” said Tom McGurk, SEWD board president. “Groundwater is our future and through projects such as these, we will ensure the continued economic prosperity of our farms and communities.”

California Sen. Michael Machado commented, “By the year 2020, the Central Valley is projected to have a 2-million acre-foot shortage of water. The technology employed by the Farmington program is proven and easily duplicated in other communities.”

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