



## Good-Bye Jennifer!

RCR's writer and editor, Jennifer Sherman, is leaving CIRS after three years of hard work and dedication.

As editor, Jennifer continued our tradition of high-quality reporting on issues facing rural California. She also designed and built CIRS's web site.

Jennifer has received a fellowship from the National Science Foundation to pursue a Ph.D. in Sociology at UC Berkeley.

CIRS is proud to welcome Shaw Perrin to the staff. He comes to us from the newsroom at Capitol Public Radio. As the new Publications Director, Shaw will be taking over Jennifer's former RCR duties.

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## Bay-Delta Water Policy: CalFed Stumbles Toward a Solution

by Shaw Perrin and Don Villarejo

Three and one-half years ago, California water policy antagonists reached a promising agreement intended to resolve one of the state's most difficult environmental problems. The historic Bay-Delta Accord brought together environmental advocates, urban water users and farm interests to address deterioration of the Bay-Delta system, a web of waterways and islands linking the San Francisco Bay and the San Joaquin and Sacramento Rivers. The Accord included a firm resolve to find solutions for the Bay-Delta system by initiating a process known as CalFed. With over \$1 billion in State and Federal funds, and the cooperation of fifteen Federal and State agencies, CalFed pledged to develop a consensus solution.

Now, just six months away from the agreed-upon four-year deadline, a solution seems as distant as ever. Three alternative plans have advanced through the CalFed process as the most desirable, but Bay Area environmental groups have proposed scrapping them completely in favor of a fundamentally different approach. And CalFed has officially pushed back final review of its own Environmental Impact Statement to the end of this year.

The approach favored by environmentalists includes permanent retirement of 400,000 to 600,000 acres of west San Joaquin Valley farmland. Irrigation water for that land now comes from the Bay-Delta. Clearly, if this Delta water is diverted away from the San Joaquin Valley, it will be available to meet urban and environmental needs. Whether this diversion will occur is not yet decided. However, CalFed's common programs require retiring at minimum 196,000, and as much as 314,000, acres of prime Delta and Central Valley farmland. This planned retirement of some of the most productive farmland in the country will occur regardless of which of the three preferred alternatives is ultimately pursued.

This news comes at a time when agricultural and rural communities already are under much stress. The 1992 Central Valley Improvement Act redirected 10 percent (roughly 800,000 acre-feet per year) of irrigation water to habitat restoration. The recent Bulletin 160-98 of the California Department of Water Resources, titled *The California Water Plan Update*, projects that by the year 2020 urban water use will increase 37 percent and environmental use will increase 2.6 percent, while agriculture's use is expected to experience a net decline of 2.3 million acre-feet per year. Meanwhile, the American Farmland Trust predicts another one million acres of prime California farmland could go out of production by 2040, due to new urban development. And a habitat

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conservation plan forming under the Endangered Species Act could take still more land out of agricultural production.

Largely absent from CalFed discussions so far are the human impacts of taking hundreds of thousands of acres of farmland out of production. Two important studies have examined the socio-economic effects of reducing irrigation water deliveries to the west side of the San Joaquin Valley. The first, published in April 1985, was prepared by L. Tim Wallace and David Strong, agricultural economists with the University of California Cooperative Extension Service. Wallace and Strong estimated the likely impacts of reallocating water from the 42,000 acre Drainage Study Area located southwest of the community of Mendota. They predicted a net reduction of \$35.4 million in direct farm cash receipts and a loss of \$27.7 million in indirect sales. In addition, the report predicted a loss of 916 jobs, a loss in personal income of about \$9.9 million, and a decline in property tax revenue of \$493,500 (in 1984 dollars).

In 1994-95 CIRS determined the socio-economic impacts of substantial reductions of irrigation supplies to the community of Mendota itself, which is surrounded by nearly 60,000 acres of irrigated farmland. The opportunity to examine these effects was provided by the unfortunate 1987-92 drought that affected many farming areas throughout the state. Surface water supplies to Mendota were reduced by as much as 75 percent in the course of the drought period.

The result was a drastic reduction in fresh vegetable production. In the case of melons, a 37 percent reduction was recorded. Consequently, Mendota payrolls fell by at least 14 percent, and three of the seven wholesale vegetable packing houses closed their doors and either

CalFed Program/Region	Farmland to be Retired
<u>Ecosystem Restoration</u> Sacramento Valley Delta San Joaquin Valley	<u>(acres)</u> 27,000 to 152,000 20,000 to 26,000 98,000 to 115,000 9,3000 to 11,000
<u>Water Quality</u> Sacramento Valley Delta San Joaquin Valley	<u>35,000 to 45,000</u>  35,000 to 45,000
<u>Long-Term Levee Protection</u> Sacramento Valley Delta San Joaquin Valley	<u>34,000 to 35,000</u> 34,000 to 35,000
<u>Storage and Conveyance</u> Sacramento Valley Delta San Joaquin Valley	<u>0 to 82,100</u> 0 to 32,000 0 to 33,500 0 to 16,6000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>196,300 to 314,100</b>

Source: CalFed's Draft Programmatic EIR/EIS

went out of business or left the area. Other adverse impacts in Mendota associated with the loss of irrigation water during the drought included: Loss of 26 percent of all of the farms of Mendota; loss of 70 percent of small family farms; an 11 percent drop in retail sales; a decline in city tax revenue; and about a 30 percent decline in agricultural land values.

Proper empirical socio-economic assessments must be undertaken *before* any further water transfers, land retirement, or other schemes that take water from agricultural communities are permitted. At present, incalculable damage is occurring as the new environmentally-driven water ethic is being pursued. In reviewing its own Environmental Impact Statement, CalFed must provide measures to lessen the adverse impacts certain to be felt in rural communities.

CalFed also must insist the Federal government pay local communities for agricultural lands already taken out of production for environmental restoration. At a June hearing of the Senate Select Committee on CalFed, chaired by Sen. Maurice Johannessen (R-Redding), Colusa County Assessor Dan O'Connel asked the Committee to pressure the Federal government for the \$500,000 it still owes the county

for land converted to wetlands in recent years. O'Connel said the county needs to this money to assist the county's already understaffed social services. He said the county's unemployment rate is 12.5 percent, well above the statewide average of 5 percent.

Also, in an era when the needs of agricultural and rural communities often take a back seat to urban and environmental needs, agriculture's positive contribution to the environment needs to be stressed. California's nine million acres of irrigated land (just one-eleventh of the state) already provides habitat to many wildlife species. "Sacramento rice fields," for example, "may sustain more waterfowl than the region's four National Wildlife Refuges," argues *Cadillac Desert* author Marc Reisner. After the rice harvest every year, a quarter of a billion pounds of waste grain is left over for waterfowl foraging. California agriculture is certainly not without its environmental problems. But "nearly any bird, mammal, amphibian, or insect is apt to prefer a farmed field to a treeless new development or shopping mall," Reisner points out.

Finally, CalFed needs to publish its \$1 billion dollar budget for public inspection to insure a fair distribution of funds among all interested parties. CalFed must ~~be~~ held to its own "solution principles," which specify that a solution to the Bay-Delta will be equitable, will reduce conflicts