

XIII.



TEEN OUTDOOR EXPERIENCE – WATER EDUCATION MODULE

HOST – DEL PUERTO WATER DISTRICT – ANTHEA HANSEN

Itinerary for Saturday, March 4, 2023 – Water Tour

8:00 am – Depart Patterson north on Interstate 5

Fun Facts about California Water - Discussion

8:45 am – Arrive Jones Pumping Plant – Tracy, CA

9:45 am – Travel to San Luis Reservoir

Fun Facts about California Water Agencies – Discussion

Ask a Question of a Water Leader

11:00 am – Arrive San Luis Reservoir Romero Visitors Center

11:30 am – Lunch

12:30 pm – Depart SLR for Westside Tour

1:30 pm – Arrive City of Los Banos – Milliken Museum

2:30 pm – Depart Newman for Stewart & Jasper

Snack/Presentation


3:30 pm – Return to Patterson

179


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FREE DOCUMENTARY FILM SCREENING - TUESDAY, MARCH 7th

 UC Merced Sierra Nevada Research Institute Presents
A Chronicles Group Documentary Film

CALIFORNIA'S WATERSHED HEALING

 THE CHRONICLES GROUP

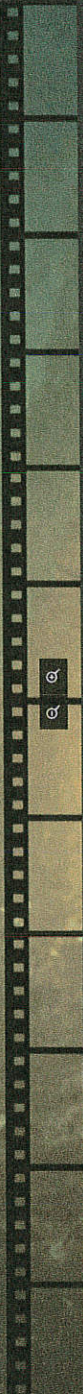
Register at Eventbrite
<https://bit.ly/3S1t8es>



When: Tuesday, March 7, 2023
Doors Open | 5:30 PM
Film Premiere | 6:00 PM
Film Q&A | 7:00 PM

Where: UC Merced Conference Center
-Free Event
-Light Refreshments Provided
-Q&A with expert panel and film producer/director

View Trailer
<http://bit.ly/3t5yZ14>



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Type here to search

56°F Cloudy 11:30 AM 3/14/2023

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Panelist Biographies

James “Jim” Thebaut, is many things, most recently, winner of the Best of Los Angeles Award for “100 Most Fascinating People in Los – 2022!” He has an intriguing career evolution: Environmental Planner, turned successful film director and producer, and now documentary film maker and advocate. He is the Director and Executive Producer of tonight’s feature film and many others like it, realized through his nonprofit organization, The Chronicles Group, which uses media to raise awareness, educate, and propose **solutions** for profound issues that are critically affecting both human and ecological systems today: from water scarcity to international security threats to climate crises.

Dr. Thomas Harmon: Professor, founding faculty, director of SNRI. Civil & Env Engineer whose research addresses toxic waste remediation, climate change impacts on watershed behavior, labor and automation issues for California agriculture, multibenefit land repurposing challenges, and broadly, transdisciplinary research to identify equitable solutions for California’s environmental problems.

Dr. Roger Bales: Professor, founding faculty and Distinguished Professor of Engineering at UC Merced, has been active in water- and climate-related research for over 30 years, leading the development of regional, national and international measurement programs (like CZO) that are critical for understanding the underlying science of climate change. Most recently, through the Center for Ecosystem Climate Solutions (CECS, a collaboration with UC Irvine), he is working to engage state’s land management agencies in climate solutions with planning, prioritizing, forecasting, and monitoring tools to get more data-driven science and technology into implementing landscape forest- and restoration project needs to reduce wildfire, restore hydrological function to our watersheds.

Dr. Safeeq Khan: Cooperative Extension Specialist, Water and Watershed Sciences, University of California Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources (UCANR), and Adjunct Professor of Civil & Environmental Engineering, UC Merced. His lab uses both modeling and field experimental approaches to investigate complex relationships between water, vegetation, and climate in a rapidly changing environment. He examines new management approaches for improving forest health, evaluating restoration impacts, and sustaining water resources.

Panel Potential Questions

1. Climate Change in California often synonymous with warming and drought, however we might perhaps better characterize it as global “weirding” rather than “warming.” Can you talk about the impacts of recent AR storms, why they may not signal the end of “D” Drought in the state, and their implications for the resiliency of both forests and their watersheds communities?
2. Can you elaborate on the importance of biomass projects (and innovative wood products) as part of the solution to wildfire and carbon sequestration needs: their potential benefits for some of the rural communities of the Sierra Nevada, and how they differ from our historical models of the logging operations of the past.
3. Much of the science here is known and its broad conclusions indisputable: forests are critically overgrown, the need to restore fire to the landscape is not apparent; but we still balance many societal dilemmas of air quality, fear & lack of trust, rural/urban divides, and cost. Can you talk a bit more about the elements that made the Yuba partnership so successful in moving past the finger pointing toward implementation, and how/whether you think this scales across the Sierra.

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MEMORANDUM

TO: SAN LUIS & DELTA-MENDOTA WATER AUTHORITY DIRECTORS
FROM: DAN KEPPEL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
SUBJECT: UPDATE REPORT
DATE: MARCH 6, 2023

This memo is intended to keep you apprised as to what is happening on policy issues the Family Farm Alliance (Alliance) is engaged in. In the past month, much of our efforts have focused on planning for and executing our successful 2023 annual conference, trekking water legislation with Senate committee staff, planning for upcoming House committee hearings, engaging in litigation and administrative matters, and expanding public outreach associated with global food insecurity and the importance of Western irrigated agriculture. These issues and other matters important to our members are further discussed in this memo.

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

1. Biden Administration Announces New Hires

The White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) announced it has hired Mr. Michael Drummond as director for permitting and innovation. He joins the permitting and environmental review team led by Ms. Jayni Hein, CEQ's senior director for clean energy, infrastructure and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). CEQ is responsible for overseeing the implementation of NEPA, which requires agencies to assess the environmental impacts of their actions. Also, Ms. Miriam Goldstein has been hired as CEQ's ocean policy director. Ms. Goldstein hails from the Center for American Progress and was most recently legislative director for Rep. Jackie Speier (D-CA). And Mr. Brendan Philip is CEQ's new deputy director for water infrastructure. He was previously an ocean policy fellow at CEQ and a fellow in EPA's Office of Wetlands, Oceans and Watersheds. Ms. Goldstein and Mr. Philip join the team led by Ms. Sara Gonzalez-Rothi, CEQ's senior director for water.

At the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), President Biden announced that he's chosen a former New Mexico congresswoman Xochitl Torres Small to serve as the next Deputy Secretary of the Agriculture Department. Ms. Torres Small joined the Biden Administration's USDA in 2021 as undersecretary for rural development after losing her House seat to Rep. Yvette Herrell (R-NM) in 2020. If confirmed by the Senate, Ms. Torres Small would replace former USDA Deputy Secretary Jewel Bronaugh who retired in January of this year.

2. White House to Advance New Round of NEPA Rule Changes

CEQ has sent the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) a second phase of changes to NEPA standards. The updated guidance calls for federal agencies to take a broader look at the climate change impacts from major new infrastructure projects, government policies and federal decisions. The often slow and cumbersome federal regulatory process is a major obstacle to realization of projects and actions that could enhance Western water supplies. NEPA implementation, in particular, can have a direct bearing on the success or failure of critical water supply enhancement projects. The guidance will likely stall progress on the reviews of projects ranging from pipelines to federal policy actions, since agencies will be instructed to consider not only the amount of greenhouse gases federal projects and decisions directly cause, but also the effects a warming world will have on the nation and its infrastructure. That reverses Trump administration NEPA guidance, which had narrowed agencies' review of the effect major federal decisions have on climate change. The Trump Administration adopted changes that reduced review times, cut page counts, limited public input, cut out "cumulative impacts" analyses, and expanded projects that could be excluded entirely from NEPA review. At the time, we were very supportive of these changes.

Last year, the Biden White House released the first phase rulemaking on NEPA in an effort to erase many of the Trump Administration's changes made to the NEPA regulations. The goal was to again highlight climate change and environmental justice in the application of new NEPA rules regulating new infrastructure projects being planned and constructed nationwide. The particulars of this second proposal remain unclear at a time when Congress may be considering permitting reforms to accelerate infrastructure investment. The CEQ issued an interim policy, Reg. 0331-AA06, which went into effect on January 9, in an effort to provide clearer guidance for how federal agencies should assess greenhouse gas emissions through NEPA.

3. Encouraging Developments at USDA

a. Meeting with Robert Bonnie, USDA Under Secretary for FPAC

Earlier this month, Alliance leaders met (virtually) with Robert Bonnie, USDA Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) and other speakers who we had invited to participate in a watershed panel discussion on Friday, February 24th during the general session of our annual conference. During our conversation, our reps did a nice job explaining the challenges of getting USDA agency staff moving efficiently to spend all the money they got in the Bipartisan

Infrastructure Law (BIL) and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). We also reiterated the concerns we made in our December 2022 coalition letter to NRCS regarding “climate smart agriculture” practices that could be funded with the \$20 million in the IRA provided to NRCS late last year. Recall that we pushed NRCS to include irrigation management and conifer removal as eligible activities. Leftist environmental interests are pushing back, and instead want the dollars going strictly to actions that lead to quantifiable reductions in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Mr. Bonnie noted that the IRA statute ties these practices closely to greenhouse gas (GHG) mitigation. However, he also said that USDA would listen to our concerns.

“It’ll be pretty good, but it won’t be perfect,” he predicted.

Well, it looks like USDA has been listening. One week after our conversation with Mr. Bonnie, USDA rolled out its game plan. Nearly \$20 billion of the total IRA investment in agriculture will support existing conservation programs that directly assist producers. The first of the funds have now been released, with [USDA announcing last month](#) that the NRCS is making \$850 million available to farmers, ranchers and foresters in fiscal year 2023. The funds will expand access to financial and technical assistance for producers to advance conservation on their farms, ranches or forest lands through practices like cover cropping, conservation tillage, wetland restoration, prescribed grazing, nutrient management, tree planting and more.

USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack also announced a new framework - [The Western Water and Working Lands Framework for Conservation Action](#), a comprehensive, multi-state strategy under NRCS) to address key water and land management challenges across 17 Western States. It is intended to provide direction, support and coordination to address resource concerns and threats across state boundaries and leverage new scientific tools to guide strategic program implementation on the ground. The Framework includes guidelines for identifying vulnerable agricultural landscapes and 13 strategies to help NRCS state leaders, water resource managers, and producers respond to priority challenges.

It sounds like this program has its roots in a listening session conducted by USDA and NRCS in the latter months of the Trump Administration (!). Guided by this new framework, Interior’s [WaterSMART Initiative](#) will invest \$25 million in three new priority areas and 37 existing priority areas, assisting communities and producers in the West. NRCS leveraged stakeholder feedback, input from the field and the latest scientific data to shape and inform the framework.

b. NRCS Western Water and Working Lands Framework for Conservation Action

NRCS has identified six major water and working land management challenges resulting from threats to water supply in the West: 1) Forecasting water supply; 2) Sustaining agricultural productivity; 3) Protecting groundwater availability; 4) Protecting surface water availability; 5) Managing and restoring rangelands and forestlands; and 6) Responding to disruptions from catastrophic events. For each of these major management challenges, opportunities exist to help individuals, entities and communities better manage water and working lands, conserve natural resources and build resilience to drought and climate change. Strategies include:

- Improve reliability of water supply forecasts.
- Improve soil moisture and irrigation water management.
- Improve water and nutrient management in crop fields and pastures.
- Modernize water infrastructure.
- Improve community water supply by completing watershed projects.
- Increase reuse of wastewater for agriculture and conservation.
- Prolong aquifer life.
- Complete managed aquifer recharge projects.
- Reduce surface water withdrawals.
- Install conservation systems that protect water quality.
- Restore and protect streams and wetlands.
- Manage and restore rangelands and forestlands.
- Increase resilience during disaster recovery.

NRCS will use this framework to set comparable goals for effective program delivery and coordinate and track progress on helping individuals, entities and communities across the West address their management, conservation and resiliency needs. NRCS believes it can build upon recent investments and expand support by advancing innovative targeting at the state, local and regional levels, while also utilizing additional funds from the IRA that advance both climate mitigation and Western water priorities. (*Emphasis added.*)

c. WaterSMART Initiative

The \$25 million investment in three new priority areas and [37 existing priority areas](#) in the West is the result of a collaboration with NRCS and Interior's WaterSMART Initiative to help farmers and ranchers conserve water and build drought resilience in their communities. These investments complement projects led by irrigation districts, water suppliers and other organizations receiving WaterSMART program funds from the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation). The three new priority areas include: 1) Madera Irrigation District Area (Funding amount: \$1.5 million); Kohala, HI Watershed Partnership Area (Funding amount: \$345,000); Quincy Columbia Basin Irrigation District (WA) West Canal Area (Funding amount: \$1.8 million).

4. Reclamation: \$728 M for New Water Conservation Projects

Last month Reclamation announced \$728 million in new investments for water conservation measures in the West. Funded by the BIL, seven authorized rural water projects under construction in Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, New Mexico, North Dakota and South Dakota will receive \$278 million. These investments build on the allocation of \$420 million for [rural water construction activities](#) in fiscal year 2022. The funding is helping projects complete construction of water treatment plants and intakes, supporting work related to pipeline connections, pump systems, and

reservoir construction, and advancing other efforts to provide potable water to rural and Tribal communities.

Reclamation also announced it would release up to \$125 million in federal funds from the FY 2023 Omnibus Appropriations bill to pay water rights holders in the Upper Colorado River Basin to temporarily forgo their allocations, as part of the System Conservation Pilot Program to reduce pressure on the drought affected river. Reclamation is currently reviewing proposals in an attempt to cut river use by up to 4 million acre-feet annually in an effort to protect hydropower production at the Glen Canyon and Hoover Dams. More than 20 years of drought has reduced the river's flows, drawing down the region's major reservoirs to meet water deliveries under the Colorado River Compact of 1922. The program, available in Colorado, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming, could pay water users at least \$150 per acre-foot of water conserved. Based on accounts we heard at our recent conference in Reno (*see below*), I think Reclamation is going to have a challenge finding takers for this program, based in part on the "insultingly low" offering price, and the fact that the hay market is short, and prices are high. Not too many folks are going to be willing to forsake that market to get compensated by Uncle Sam not to farm.

DEVELOPMENTS IN CONGRESS

5. March 8, 2023 House Water, Wildlife and Fisheries Subcommittee Hearing

The House Committee on Natural Resources, Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries (WWF) is conducting a hearing this Wednesday afternoon on the importance of multi-purpose water management across the country. While conflicts over water resources have existed long-term, federal policies and non-elected government agency staff have exacerbated some of these conflicts and threatened economies, the environment and ways of life. This hearing will explore those threats while focusing on solutions. I've been asked to testify at this hearing, along with Scott Corwin (Executive Director, Northwest Public Power Association), Martha Guyas (Southeast Fisheries Policy Director, American Sportfishing Association) and Amy Cordalis, a long-time advocate for, and member of, the Yurok Tribe in northern California.

We'll be sending out additional information on this hearing, including my written testimony and a live stream link, in the coming days. My spoken, 5-minute statement will focus on: 1) the huge snowpack in California, and the importance of managing that in a way that sends most of it out to the ocean with minimal environmental benefits and NO benefits for human uses; 2) the multi-decade failure of the flow-centric management scheme to "protect" fish on the West coast. I'll also briefly touch on the need for accountability and a new way of doing business regarding Endangered Species Act implementation, pointing to efforts in the Sacramento Valley and Yakima Basin as templates for success; and 3) Now is not the time for our government to be taking farmland out of production.

6. FY 2024 Appropriations Process

The Senate Appropriations Committee recently [announced](#) that the committee will again be accepting earmark requests from senators for the FY 2024 appropriations cycle, in addition to posting a list of [subcommittee deadlines](#) for senators to submit FY24 earmark requests back to the Committee, which range from March 30—April 13, 2023. Many Senate offices have now set internal deadlines for public entities to submit FY24 earmark requests to their office (to provide time to vet and approve them), ranging from February 28-March 24. The Committee has sent FY24 earmark guidance directly to all Senate offices—see [here](#) for a copy of the detailed guidance document provided by Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer’s (D-NY) office. All Senate earmark accounts that were available for FY23 are, once again, available in FY24 and no new accounts have been added.

The Ferguson Group (TFG) – our advocate in Washington, D.C. – recently prepared an excellent report that outlines detailed information and guidance documents for all eligible earmark accounts utilized in the enacted FY 2022 and FY 2023 omnibus spending packages (which were signed into law on March 15, 2022 and December 29, 2022, respectively). Please let me know if you would like to see the TFG “earmark” report.

7. Protect the West Act

Sens. Michael Bennet (D-CO) and John Hickenlooper (D-CO) unveiled legislation last week, the *Protect the West Act of 2023*, that would create a USDA-managed \$60 billion Outdoor and Watershed Restoration Fund for investments in Western forest and watershed restoration programs. Under the legislation, a new Restoration Fund Advisory Council would allocate the money for various projects in the West. The legislation would assign \$20 billion for direct payments to state and local governments, tribal nations, special districts and nonprofit organizations. The other \$40 billion would go to state and tribal nations to address the wildfire mitigation backlog and other projects. As reported last month, Senator Bennet’s office reached out to us to discuss suggestions to improve the bill from the last Congress. The revised legislation incorporates all of those recommendations. Two weeks ago, we let the Bennet office know we are on board with supporting this legislation.

Wildfire is back on the congressional agenda this week with hearings on forest policy and on the climbing economic costs of blazes associated with climate change. The Senate Budget Committee will hear from experts in prescribed fire, climate change and other issues surrounding wildfire policy, while the newly formed House Agriculture Subcommittee on Forestry holds its first hearing on the upcoming five-year farm bill. The Senate hearing — entitled "Burning Issue: the Economic Costs of Wildfires" — could shed light on wildfires' implications for insurance and lending, as well as on-the-ground impacts in places like New Mexico, home of a county commissioner who's set to testify.

MID rehires attorney years after settling discrimination suit



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MID general counsel Ronda Lucas. Photographed Feb. 14, 2019, at the Modesto Irrigation District building in downtown Modesto.

BY JOHN HOLLAND
JHOLLAND@MODBEE.COM

The Modesto Irrigation District board voted 4-1 on Tuesday to bring back an attorney who had sued the agency over gender issues.

Ronda Lucas will assist General Counsel Wes Miliband under a contract yet to be negotiated. Director Janice Keating dissented after noting that the cost and other details were not available before the vote.

Miliband said Lucas would concentrate in part on the state's push to boost reservoir releases to aid Tuolumne River fish. She also will handle issues related to how the board interacts with the staff.

Lucas headed MID's legal team from January 2016 until her termination in November 2018. In a 2019 lawsuit, she alleged sexual harassment and discrimination.

Lucas settled the case the next year and received a \$320,000 payment from the district, which did not admit liability.

Tuesday's vote was the first involving legal staffing since the November election brought three new board members. Keating, John Boer and Robert Frobose joined Larry Byrd and Nick Blom. Stu Gilman lost his re-election bid. John Mensinger and Paul Campbell did not seek new terms.

Frobose said Lucas has the skills to protect MID's water supplies and should not have been fired by the previous board.

290

“This is what was on my mind, the way Ronda Lucas was treated,” he said.

The contract drew criticism from Ripon-based attorney Stacy Henderson, whose clients include farmers in MID. She said the public needs to know the cost of the contract and whether Lucas might cause tension with the current staff.

“Explain that to your ratepayers, who had to fund her settlement and lawsuit,” Henderson said.

The Tuolumne flow issue has been going on for several years and also involves diversions by the Turlock Irrigation District and San Francisco. They reached a tentative compromise last year with the State Water Resources Control Board but still have to nail down the details.

“We’ve got to put our best offense in front of us,” Boer said of his vote for Lucas, “or we’re going to be playing defense the whole time.”

John Holland: 209-578-2385

242