Senator Melissa Hurtado
REPRESENTING SENATE DISTRICT 14

Senate Bill 559
Restoring Water Supply in the Central Valley

As Amended August 25th, 2020

SUMMARY

SB 559 provides the state a pathway to invest in one of California's most critical pieces of water delivery infrastructure, the Friant-Kern Canal.

THE PROBLEM

Since its completion in 1949, the Friant-Kern Canal's conveyance capacity has degraded due to several factors, including severe land subsidence caused by regional groundwater overdraft. As a gravity-fed canal designed with a continual slope of 6 inches per mile, the canal's carrying capacity is limited by every inch the structure sinks. A portion of the canal roughly 20 miles long has subsided twelve feet below its original design elevation, including three feet of subsidence from 2014-2017, alone. As a result, the southernmost 1/3 of the canal has lost 60 percent of its ability to carry water. Farms, cities, and rural communities who rely on the canal are losing up to 300,000 acre-feet per year in deliveries.

Today, more than 100 rural communities in the San Joaquin Valley have contaminated tap water, while many others have seen their wells go dry. The Friant-Kern Canal is a key facility for delivering clean runoff from the San Joaquin River watershed to recharge groundwater aquifers relied on by some of California's most vulnerable communities.

Moreover, agriculture is the driving force for the San Joaquin Valley's economy, with one of every five jobs in the valley directly related to agriculture. The farms supported by Friant-Kern Canal deliveries generate about $4 billion in annual production and support jobs for tens of thousands of people, all of which are impacted directly or indirectly by this reduction in supply.

Finally, as the canal is critical for delivering water specifically for groundwater recharge, limitations on canal deliveries will further challenge the valley's ability to meet the goals of California's Sustainable Groundwater Management Act of 2014 (SGMA).

BACKGROUND

The Friant-Kern Canal was completed in 1949, and runs 152 miles from Friant Dam to the Kern River in Bakersfield. It was built to address groundwater overdraft on the valley's Eastside and delivers San Joaquin River water to 32 cities and irrigation districts. In wet years, canal users take surface water from the canal and also store some of it in underground aquifers for use in dry years. The canal delivers water to seven cities or counties that serve nearly 160,000 municipal connections, as well as 18,000 individual family farms cultivating nearly 1.2 million acres – almost a quarter of the Valley's agriculture land and 22 percent of all farms in California.

For more than 60 years, the Friant-Kern Canal helped the Eastside successfully maintain stable groundwater levels and continue a thriving agricultural economy. However, during California's most severe drought conditions from 2012 - 2016, many valley farms and communities relied mostly or solely on groundwater. This caused a dramatic decline in groundwater levels, making drinking water wells go dry and causing the severe land

subsidence that led to the Friant-Kern Canal's conveyance constriction.

In 2014, California enacted SGMA, which requires local water users to bring groundwater use to sustainable levels by early 2040; most of the highest-priority groundwater basins to balance under SGMA are in the San Joaquin Valley. However, communities are grappling to address the new requirements to protect groundwater supplies and quality. Complying with SGMA will require a concerted effort to recharge groundwater aquifers when surface water is most available during the year.

The Public Policy Institute of California and others have noted in recent reports that conveyance restrictions on the Friant-Kern Canal are a major limitation for increasing groundwater recharge valley, where nearly half of the cropland is suitable for on-farm recharge projects that support long-term water sustainability for communities and farms.

SOLUTION

SB 559 requires the Department of Water Resources to report to the Legislature on federal funding provided to restore the FKC by March 31st, 2021. Included in the report include:

- Federal funding approved in the 2021 Congressional Budget or otherwise provided to the Friant Water Authority or other governmental agency to restore the capacity of the FKC;
- Whether the FKC restoration is to the original or different design capacity;
- A proposal for the state to pay a share of the project cost, not to exceed 35 percent of the total project cost, and how the money will be spent.

SUPPORT

Friant Water Authority (**Sponsor**)
Arvin-Edison Water Storage District
County of Fresno
County of Tulare
Fresno County Farm Bureau
Grimmway Farms
Honorable Jim Costa, Member of Congress
Honorable Josh Harder, Member of Congress
Honorable TJ Cox, Member of Congress
Kaweah Delta Water Conservation District
Kern County
Kern County Farm Bureau
Kern County Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
Kern-Tulare Water District
Lower Tule River Irrigation District
Pixley Irrigation District
Rural County Representatives of California
South Valley Water Association
Tea Pot Dome Water District
Tulare County Board of Supervisors
Tulare Irrigation District
Western Growers Association

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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