

Whose Water Is It?

First in a series

By Tim Crews

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Willows — Most people think no more about their water than they used to think about their fuel.

There are huge tests and changes coming in the North Valley whose counties sit on the Lower Tuscan aquifer and the major players in what will change our way of life forever — one way or the other — wet or dry — are silent. No outreach to explain to the community what is going on. There's been no real attempt to involve the general community in what will be a test of the viability of our combined future.

What is not spoken aloud: If the landowners sell their water rights, what is left?

And some water experts are absolutely furious when questions of any kind are raised.

The whale in the aquarium is the Glenn-Codora [Glenn-Colusa] Irrigation District, a public entity in which only landowners have a say.

In cooperation with smaller districts, like Orland-Artois, GCID is preparing to drill seven more “test” wells, in order, they say, to see how much water is in the Lower Tuscan and how it recharges.

Some of these wells are 18 inches in diameter. Enormous amounts of water will be produced and, at first, spilled back into area irrigation canals.

The reason for that, it is argued, however quietly, is the state is coming for our water. To give it to vote-powerful L.A. and the endangered Delta smelt.

Across the river, the Butte Environmental Council is bucking the GCID plan.

Locally, almost no one knows that subsidence measurement instruments or points have been marked, some as high as the turnoff of County Road 302 on Highway 162, seven miles east of the city. The subsidence measurement will tell officials how much Glenn County is settling as the water is sucked from under it.

“GCID has a \$1.4 million grant to gain total control of the ground water under parts of Butte, Glenn, and Tehama counties,” wrote BEC in its lawsuit winding its way through Glenn County Superior Court.

“A federal grant agreement, signed Sept. 27, 2006, states that the objective of the project is to,

“ (1) increase the Sacramento Valley's long-term water supply reliability and availability;

“ (2) provide additional water supply for the Bay-Delta;

“ (3) **make water available for in-basin and out-of-basin transfers that will improve statewide water supply reliability ...** [emphasis added]



Artois — Water, seemingly abundant, overflows a standpipe on County Road 33 a few days ago, while the orchard irrigation system was repaired.

Valley Mirror photo by Tim Crews.

“(4) improve the water quality and environmental conditions of the Sacramento River system, including the Delta and San Francisco Bay.”

The fear, of course, is that option three is what this is all about and the BEC argues that 85 percent of Butte County residents get their drinking water from the Lower Tuscan. But Glenn and Colusa counties get not only drinking water, but almost all of our economy from it.

So far GCID has been silent on the project and the future.

In this series we will examine the future and politics of our water and we will explore what happens if water transfers overcome agriculture and the bulk of what makes this place green is sent to the lawns and pools of Los Angeles.