

# PERSPECTIVE

The Oakdale Leader

## GUEST OPINION

### OID Plans For The Community's Future

The Oakdale Irrigation District (OID) has launched what people are calling the most important effort since the Tri-Dam Project was constructed some 50 years ago. This effort will produce a Water Resources Plan, which will provide a roadmap to guide our next 20-30 years of water management. This Plan may seem only relevant to the agricultural community, but be assured; water planning affects everyone in our region.

I believe the State's water woes are going to be solved at the expense of irrigation districts. It is doubtful OID will escape this scrutiny based on the following: while most irrigation districts enjoy flat terrain, OID is not so fortunate. Our canals are on hilly country making irrigated fields irregular and difficult to manage for water. Our service area has few storage reservoirs and simple water change can

take up to 18 hours to make, if made at all. OID's 80-year old infrastructure is out of date, inefficient to manage and badly in need of repairs.

Land use is changing in the District. Subdivisions and "ranchette" developments are springing up haphazardly; pasture is converting to trees; dairies are getting larger; and fields irrigated by flood are converting to drip feed by groundwater, impacting water table levels. All of these lead to challenges in the way we address and manage our water resources.

At the same time, we in agriculture are being asked to clean the water that leaves our fields; the state is taking \$1 million a year in property tax revenues from OID; and on the horizon it looks like we'll be paying user fees for

the right to divert water to grow our nation's food supply. To say the least, our economic challenges are becoming even more challenging.

Together, these issues have led the OID Board of Directors to move forward with a long-term planning effort that will determine how best to meet these challenges, what are the most cost-effective solutions and how do we pay for them.

Most importantly, however, is the assurance that our rights to water are fully protected.

The District has retained experienced people in this effort. They are looking at all the District's resources and are preparing options for consideration. By November, the District will have a Draft Plan to begin the required California Environmental Qual-

ity Act process. Actual implementation of projects will follow, phased in to match the availability of funds. At OID, we want this to be the "best district it can afford to be." We want to do this while keeping water rates low and without burdening the land with bond financing, and we believe we can.

As a large employer in the Oakdale area, and a significant community resource, OID's future is directly linked to that of our region. Ensuring a reliable, long-term water supply, fixing the system, protecting OID's water rights and figuring out how to pay for it, is a tall order. But the District is committed to the future of the entire Oakdale community and its customers. This is the purpose of the OID Water Resources Plan.

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