

GUEST OPINION

The OID Water Resources Plan

What We've Learned

By STEVE KNELL

For the past several months, the Board of Directors and staff at Oakdale Irrigation District (OID) and its resource planning team have been hard at work studying the various fundamentals that shape OID and its water system. This effort, known as the OID Water Resources Plan, is designed to guide the District for the next 20 years.

One of the key areas the teams have been studying is past, current and future land use and how changes in crop types will change the demand for OID water. Land use also touches on a number of other areas that influence water demand, including urban growth. How and where will the cities of Riverbank and Oakdale grow? How much ag land will be converted to homes?

We've also been looking at the OID water delivery system, which is badly in need of repair. What projects are "a must do?" Which projects, if implemented, will improve OID service to its growers?

We've looked at water use in the District. We've talked to customers about their future needs and what services they'd like us to provide. We've studied the amount that is leaving the District in the form of drainwater or water OID releases for other purposes, called spills.

The significant findings to date are:

- Agricultural land around the city areas is urbanizing which will impact OID by causing a decreased demand for OID water.
- OID customers are changing the type of crops they are growing – the shift is from pasture to higher value permanent crops, which often means a switch from surface to groundwater, leading to a decrease in demand for OID water. These two factors will require OID to enhance its level of service it provides to keep up with changing customer needs.

- Opportunities exist to expand the District's current customer base.

- Simple system improvements can enhance water supply reliability and reduce regional groundwater pumping.

- Significant investment in repairs to existing OID system needs to be made where the need is greatest.

- The amount of water leaving OID (either as tailwater from crops or due to operational needs) is significant by any estimate and, to the extent possible, must be managed for the beneficial use of the region.

- The cost of the repairs, service improvements and any other projects identified in the study must be made on a pay-as-you-go financial plan.

OID wants to be the best irrigation district it can afford to be. The District cannot finance improvements on the backs of its customers nor can it rely upon highly variable power revenues from Tri-Dam. The financial component is a key element of the plan and will be carefully evaluated to ensure that needed improvements are implemented in a prudent fiscal manner.

For what we see on the horizon, this is not a time to sit still. Our water must be protected from those envious eyes who want our wealth. We value your input on this matter and encourage your participation.

Steve Knell is the general manager of the Oakdale Irrigation District. Opinions are those of the author and do not necessarily represent views of this publication or its corporate entity.