

Butte Environmental Council Challenges Glenn Colusa Irrigation District Again

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Regional Ground Water at Risk

(Chico, CA) – Butte Environmental Council (BEC) has again challenged Glenn Colusa Irrigation District's (GCID) project that claims to be exempt from environmental review under the guise of "research." The proposed project will install seven more production wells into the deep portions of the aquifer underlying Butte, Glenn, and Tehama counties to test their capacity to extract ground water. Previous litigation by BEC filed in September 2007 caused GCID to withdraw its initial approval of the exemption. The latest exemption document that was approved in November 2007 contains assertions by a consultant in an attempt to justify GCID's claim that this project qualifies as research.

GCID is using public money to expand its role in water marketing. The current project is part of a much larger set of plans to "integrate" ground water into the state water supply. GCID has been pursuing these plans for many years. While speculators are allowed to propose myriad types of projects in California, the law requires that they analyze the potential impacts and mitigate them through the California Environmental Quality Act. Barbara Vlamis, BEC's Executive Director, opined, "It is pretty stunning that GCID is still trying to justify avoiding environmental review. A conscientious exploration of the consequences of their proposal and plans would not only meet state requirements, but would go a long way toward acting like a good neighbor and not just talking about it."

Below is list of plans that GCID is party to:

- Sacramento Valley Water Management Agreement (Phase 8, October 2001).
- Estimating the Potential for In Lieu Conjunctive Water Management in the Central Valley of California (2002).
- Regional Integration of the Lower Tuscan Formation Using Conjunctive Water Management in the Sacramento Valley Regional Integration of the Lower Tuscan Groundwater Formation into the Sacramento Valley Surface Water System Through Conjunctive Water Management (June 2005).
- Sacramento Valley Integrated Regional Water Management Plan (2006).

GCID's proposed project will extract a volume of ground water that approaches or exceeds the current utilization by the city of Chico, creating the likelihood of a significant adverse environmental impact. Exploiting ground water for beneficial uses can only be sustained if water removed does not exceed the recharge rate. While this concept of sustainability is relatively clear, it is not part of the proposed project nor does it take into account the potential impacts of extraction on surface waters and ecosystems. BEC requests that the Glenn County Superior Court require the preparation of an environmental impact report by a more appropriate lead agency and that all activities surrounding the project are halted.

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