

Plans to use Auquifier As a Reservoir in Local Contracts

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Production Wells are Just the Beginning

Chico, CA – Butte Environmental Council (BEC) has filed its brief in the lawsuit against Glenn Colusa Irrigation District's (GCID) project to install seven more production wells into the Lower Tuscan aquifer that provides water for over 85% of Butte County's residents. GCID claimed the project is exempt from environmental review because they view it as a "research" endeavor. While GCID's exemption claim will be challenged in Glenn County Superior Court on May 22nd, BEC found startling information while preparing for the case: GCID has a \$1.4 million grant to gain total control of the ground water under parts of Butte, Glenn, and Tehama counties.

A federal grant agreement, signed September 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] (4) improve the water quality and environmental conditions of the Sacramento River system, including the Delta and San Francisco Bay."

Under Task B, the Lower Tuscan Integrated Planning Program, the agreement states that, " GCID shall define three hypothetical water delivery systems from the State Water Project (Oroville), the Central Valley Project (Shasta) and the Orland Project reservoirs sufficient to provide a full and reliable surface water delivery to parties now pumping from the Lower Tuscan Formation. The purpose of this activity is to describe and compare the performance of three alternative ways of furnishing a substitute surface water supply to the current Lower Tuscan Formation groundwater users to eliminate the risks to them of more aggressive pumping from the Formation and to optimize conjunctive management of the Sacramento Valley water resources."

"This only confirms our worst fears," stated Barbara Vlamis, BEC's Executive Director. "The federal and state agencies and the water contractors see our groundwater basin as the solution to their disastrous manipulation of California's water for urban sprawl and desert agriculture south of the delta," she continued. "Fixing the environment elsewhere is used as the bait to make it palatable to the public, but dewatering the local aquifer will have devastating impacts on local farms and north state creeks and rivers," Vlamis concluded. GCID is using both federal and state money to expand its role in water marketing and commercializing local groundwater. It is crystal clear that the seven well project is part of a much larger set of plans to "integrate" ground water into the state water supply and that the players are closer to implementation. GCID and other water districts have been pursuing these plans for many years.

Below is list of plans GCID is party to that expose the framework for the exploitation of local ground water:

- 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 seven well 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. BEC has requested that the Glenn County Superior Court require the preparation of an environmental impact report by a more appropriate lead agency and that the Court halt all activities surrounding the project. This is only the beginning of a protracted battle to protect local ground water for the residents, economy, and environment of the northern Sacramento Valley.

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Water Facts

- There is currently little detailed, scientific understanding of the ground water basin under Butte, Glenn, and Tehama counties.
- The vast majority (87%) of Butte County residents depend on ground water for their drinking water
- The Tuscan Formation aquifer, which underlies Butte, Glenn, and Tehama counties holds approximately 30 million acre feet (AF) of water (an acre foot is 325,900 gallons of water).
- Los Angeles' Metropolitan Water District is looking for 300,000 AF from the Sacramento Valley by 2010 and 550,000 AF by 2020.
- Glenn Colusa Irrigation District and its partners have been funded by the State of California to explore selling ground water from the aquifer.
- In 1994, 105,000 acre-feet of water were sold from Butte County. Individual wells ran dry, one Durham community well was forced to close, hoses ran between neighbors' houses for water emergencies, people unwittingly drank polluted water before the water ran out, and one family lost their farm from the impacts [see Harper's article, provided at press conference].
- There is currently no real protection for Butte County's ground water other than the California Environmental Quality Act.
- The San Joaquin River is already dewatered in its upper reaches from excess water consumption and a significant portion of the San Joaquin ground water basin has been compacting (some areas over 30 feet!).
- The amount of energy currently devoted to pumping water over the Tehachapi mountain range from northern to southern California is equal to one third of the entire household energy use of southern California.