Rural Water Impact Network
A Program of the Community Alliance with Family Farmers Foundation

Judith Redmond, Executive Director

Comments Concerning United States Department of Interior's Administrative Proposal for Urban Water Supply Reliability

Adrienne Alvord
Program Coordinator

J. Stacey Sullivan, Esq.
Program Consultant

July 22, 1996

Comments On Department of Interior's Administrative Proposal for Urban Water Supply Reliability

Introduction:

These comments are presented by the Rural Water Impact Network (R-WIN), the water policy program of the Community Alliance with Family Farmers Foundation (CAFF). CAFF is a grassroots, membership-based organization whose concerns encompass agricultural, environmental and community economic and cultural interests. CAFF's membership and programs extend throughout the Central Valley and coastal agricultural regions. CAFF provides technical assistance, education, and policy representation for family scale farmers, rural communities, and citizens concerned with sustainable agriculture.

R-WIN has not been a participant on the Urban Reliability Team whose members addressed the issues in the Administrative Proposal. However, the issues are of great importance to CAFF members and constituents.

The following comments primarily address Part II of the Administrative Proposal.

A. What minimum level of reliability should be provided to urban water contractors?

CAFF strongly supports the Bureau of Reclamation's position that a minimum level of water supply reliability "only should be provided to those urban contractors who have implemented significant water conservation practices."

However, CAFF is concerned that Reclamation plans to set the M&I shortage policy to 75 percent of historic deliveries "adjusted for growth". We understand that this adjustment only applies up to the level of full contract delivery, but we are concerned because the CVP is now over-allocated and adjustments for growth will almost certainly come out of agriculture. While Reclamation wants to implement this policy "in a way that minimizes impacts to agricultural contractors", CAFF is concerned that analysis of contractor impacts alone will not be sufficient to prevent localized impacts. Reclamation should include community provisions in its impact analysis and explore possible community mitigation measures as well.

CAFF recommends that Reclamation's impact analysis include participation from rural community leaders and elected representatives, and researchers who are familiar with the effects of water supply cutbacks on agricultural areas. In addition, Reclamation should consider coordinating this analysis with the development of a water impacts clearinghouse that is part of its Water Transfers Administrative Proposal. Impacts will result from reallocation

as well as from transfers, and it is both cost effective and efficient to coordinate the data collection effort.

As we have stated in our comments concerning the Water Transfers Administrative Proposal, CAFF believes it is not enough to simply identify impacts after the fact. Every effort should be made to avoid or minimize impacts to the community as well as to agricultural contractors. Those impacts that are unavoidable need to be mitigated. It is a major failing of this process that so far there is no proposal for a mechanism or program to address these impacts.

B. How should other water supplies developed by a contractor be considered/protected in urban shortage allocations?

CAFF supports Reclamation's general position that consideration of other water supplies be approached on a situational basis (water year type, CVP system constraints, availability of other supplies). While CAFF has no objection in principle to Reclamation working with contractors on a case-by-case basis, there need to be clear guidelines as to how "historic usage" is calculated and exactly what a "minimum level of reliability" means.

C. What should be the reliability of water converted or transferred from irrigation to M&I use?

CAFF agrees with Reclamation's position of maintaining the same shortage criteria as was applicable to the water before the transfer or conversion occurred.

General Comments:

CAFF was very interested in the position taken by urban contractors on this issue. The urban position has no particular legal or statutory basis. Fundamentally, it is an assertion that urban consumptive needs are more important than agricultural needs. The primary arguments used to support this assertion were based on the idea that human needs (e.g. planning, development, health, commerce, etc.) should take precedence over the needs of any particular sector. What this view fails to take into account is that agriculture is not just a business- in many areas, it is the basis for the existence of scores of small communities throughout the CVP service area, as well as the only source of income for thousands of families. Rural communities have no less a need for planning, development, health, commerce, etc. than urban areas and in most cases have fewer resources to support such needs. While CAFF understands that urban water users need a minimum level of reliability, rural residents need a reliability standard as well. This fact has largely been overlooked in the CVPIA Administrative Process, and was not mentioned in the Administrative Proposal for Urban Water Supply Reliability.

CAFF has argued that human economic, health and community needs should be considered in rural areas before reallocation or transfers take place. Unfortunately, the Bureau of Reclamation and the urban, agricultural and environmental stakeholders who have participated in the CVPIA Administrative Process have either not responded or heavily qualified their support for consideration of these needs. As a government agency responsible for CVP water deliveries, Reclamation has a legal and ethical responsibility to see that the needs of all sectors and users are addressed, with equal treatment for all regardless of political, economic or social status.

CAFF believes that urban, environmental and landowner needs are no more or less important than the needs of human beings whose communities and livelihoods depend on the reliable delivery of CVP water. CAFF has always supported policies and farm practices that result in a healthy environment as well as an economically viable agricultural sector. CAFF also supports managing the CVP in such a way that all its uses are fairly and adequately supplied. If it is necessary to change the way water is allocated in order to meet these needs, then it is up to Reclamation to consider the consequences for those populations that could suffer due to reallocation. Reclamation has a responsibility to see to it that appropriate forms of mitigation are enacted for these populations.