



## North Valley recycled water program now underway

by Gene Beley, Delta Correspondent

PATTERSON

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- **First time recycled water has been put into a federal facility**
- **“They probably only understood half of it, but trusted us and let us go forward”**

David Murillo, regional director for the federal Bureau of Reclamation’s Mid-Pacific region, was addressing an audience of more than 100 people who came to celebrate the ground breaking of the new North Valley Recycled Water Program.

He said that when he awoke that morning, he tried to figure out what was different.

“I’ve been in this job for four years and had forgotten what it was like to smile,” Mr. Murillo said, going on to say this \$80 million project would deliver nearly 60,000 acre-feet of new water.

“That is huge, when you look at what we’ve had to go through the last three-four years with only 500 to 1,000 acre feet,” he said. “But the best thing about it is you guys get to control it. It’s a reliable source for you that make your jobs and mine easier. That’s why this project is so unique and one of the future.”

The North Valley Recycled Water Program is a joint effort between communities like Turlock, Modesto, and Ceres and the Del Puerto Water District. The recycled water produced by the cities of Modesto and Turlock will be conveyed via a direct pipeline to the Delta-Mendota Canal and used directly or stored in the San Luis Reservoir. By utilizing the Delta Mendota-Canal, it will provide for the delivery of irrigation water to local agriculture and for temporary storage of the water for later delivery and to benefit wildlife refuges.

Every VIP speaker stressed how it took a multitude of government agencies that had local, state, and federal agencies working closely together for the past decade to make it happen. They all seemed to say it was a really big deal and “huge.”

Brad Hawn, the MC for the event in Patterson held in a remote area next to the Delta-Mendota canal, said, “this is a monumental project for our county, Bureau of Reclamation, our communities, and the State Water Resources Control Board.” He added that it is the first time that recycled water has ever been put into a federal facility.

Larry Parlin, director of utilities for the city of Modesto, said it is a business deal between a willing buyer and willing seller of recycled water. “It’s a deal created by the city, but Turlock is in there with the Del Puerto Water District to make it happen,” he said.

“I want to commend the Modesto City Council present and past members because once we consummated the deal, we came back hard, fast, and furious for documents for approval on a monthly basis,” he said. “They probably only understood half of it, but trusted us and let us go forward, because one delay or two week delay on this project meant that we wouldn’t be here today.

With the pipelines, state regulations and all the funding, we had to make a commitment to build it fast and on time to make it cost effective.”

“The reason we are all here today because of desperation,” said Mr. Hawn. “It kept us all at the table. There isn’t any more desperate person in this area than the farmer with zero [water] allocation.”

A young farmer, Daniel Bays, said in his area, many family farms depend on the Del Puerto Water District to keep farms and businesses going to support their families and employees. “This is hopefully a project that will support us for the next generation for long term sustainability of farming in this area,” he said. “We’re looking forward to a more reliable water supply than we’ve had for the past few years.”

Turlock Mayor Gary Soiseth said that when he was growing up, recycle, reduce and reuse was a phrase used for trash. “But that phrase is very applicable to water in the Central Valley,” he said.

“When I was driving over here I called my 87 year-old grandmother who sits on 20 acres of almonds in Turlock,” he told the audience.

“What are you doing today?” she asked.

“I’m going over to a recycled water project ground breaking,” he said. “They are getting water from Turlock and recycling it for west side farmers.”

“There was no reaction or rivalry,” the Turlock mayor said. “There was no reaction of ‘That’s our water.’

“Instead she said, ‘Good job. I’m proud of you!’

“And that’s why we are all elected officials to do projects like this for the region to protect farmers — not just for the east side or west side. We’re all in this together.”

Ceres Mayor Chris Vierra said, “Water is gold. This process has not been easy. It is collaboration. I can’t speak enough how important it is to keep water in the region.”

Modesto Mayor Ted Brandvold said it is the largest project that’s beneficial to the protection of water resources ever undertaken in the Central Valley.

“It shows what a partnership between farmers and urban water users can do,” he said.

Ric Ortega, general manager of the Grassland Water and Resource Conservation district for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation Refuge Water Supply Program, said it would provide thousands of acres of critical habitat for the North Valley region. “It will support hundreds of species of migratory birds that roam through this area and are so dependent on the last remaining wetlands of California.”

He added that 95 percent of the wetlands in California have been lost. “So these projects regionally sound of the Delta are really instrumental.” He said it has not only regional importance but also hemispheric importance and called it “the most critical area in the nation for winterizing water birds.”

“You might ask, ‘Why is Stanislaus County in this partnership because they don’t have any trees they grow themselves,’” added Mr. Hawn, a consultant on the project and a former Modesto City Council member.

“The county was critical in this because they are the glue that held us together.” County Supervisor Terry Withrow said perseverance made it happen. “We just needed some funds to get it started and knew we could pay it back.”

U.S. Rep. Jeff Denham, R-Modesto, said this project will provide water from the east side to the west side but ultimately, “not only will Stanislaus County be in a better place, this water also services part of Merced County. It is a Valley project.”

Mr. Denham promised that he and other key people like U.S. Rep. Jim Costa, D-Fresno, will stay on top of the Army Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation, EPA and other federal agencies “until it gets done on time and on budget.”

Mr. Costa said he feels the project is a model for water projects that will be seen more often in the future. He said the communities and Del Puerto Water District really came together with a vision. “The vision was to make the water work in ways we have only dreamed about,” he said. “Today we are dedicating that dream to become reality.”

“We all know how valuable every acre foot of water is,” Mr. Costa continued. “You look at San Luis Reservoir today with less than 10 percent — the lowest it has been in 27 years. The value of water has changed so dramatically since this drought began five years ago.

“We must fix this broken water system. We must divert for more man-made droughts in the future and for climate changes occurring. This kind of project is truly a prototype of other kinds of projects up and down the Valley.”

“There is always a possibility for positive change in an ever changing, complicated world, as long as you continue to believe that your reservoir is half full and not half empty,” concluded Anthea Hansen, general manager of the Del Puerto Water District and one of the spark plugs behind the project.

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