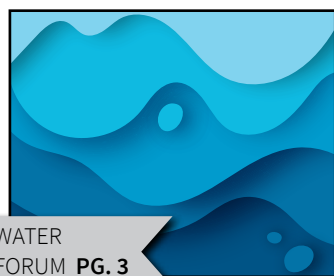


## INSIDE



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## SGMA Fees and Assessments

By Dusty Ference

During the February meeting of the Mid Kings River Groundwater Sustainability Agency (MKRGSA), the GSA's board of directors approved a Proposition 218 fee study. This action marked the first Prop. 218 election for the MKRGSA since SGMA was adopted. Approving the study is the first step in the Prop. 218 election process before land owners in the district vote on the proposed assessment.

The approved fee study includes a detailed budget outlining proposed expenses for administration, operations, reserves, the dry well mitigation program, recharge basin development, and subsidence mitigation.

For 2024, the estimated budget is \$11.5 million, and for years 2025 through 2028, the GSA estimates an approximate budget of \$11.3 million annually.

Funding for the proposed budget will come from two fee categories. The first is a per-acre assessment that will be collected with property taxes. The fee study states that the GSA proposes an annual assessment of up to \$25 per acre annually. The second category is a groundwater pumping fee. Pumping fees

will be charged based on which aquifer a landowner chooses to pump from. Under the current proposal, pumping from the A and B Zone aquifers could cost up to \$95 per acre-foot per year. While pumping from the C Zone or below the Corcoran Clay could cost as much as \$35 per acre-foot per year. Additionally, landowners that exceed the pumping cap determined by the MKRGSA are subject to an exceedance penalty of up to \$500 per acre-foot.

It is essential to highlight that the MKRGSA board of directors sets fee rates yearly. However, voters determine the maximum allowable fees as part of the Prop. 218 election. The reason for the two funding categories is determined by State law. Any district charging an assessment is limited to using those fees to fund administration, operation, and funding reserves. In the case of any Groundwater Sustainability Agency assessments, they cannot be used to fund special projects. In this case, a portion of the pumping fees paid to a GSA may apply to operations costs, and the GSA will use the remaining to fund projects such as a well mitigation fund, development of recharge basins, and subsidence mitigation efforts.

Per State law, the MKRGSA has scheduled a public hearing for the proposed fees on April 23, 2024. Ballots will be counted at this hearing, and MKRGSA will announce the results. This type of election is determined by the number of protest votes, meaning if a majority of property owners submit protests, the GSA may not adopt the fees.

Hearing notices must be mailed to all affected landowners at least 45 days before. During the February board meeting, staff of the MKRGSA reported proposed informational meetings they intend to host before the April 23 public hearing. These meetings will be an excellent opportunity

*"SGMA" continued on page 3*

## Season's Precipitation Totals Still Anyone's Guess

By Steve Pastis

Back in the fall, meteorologist Scott Handel, head of forecast operations for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), told FarmLife that there was "a strong chance" Kings County could experience above average precipitation in the winter. He noted, however, that "recent trends tend to favor a dry winter."

"The end result is that a strong El Niño will bring strong precipitation to Southern California, but Kings County is on the border of where the uncertainty is," he said.

"Kings County did receive less precipitation with (a mid-February) storm as the heaviest precipitation was focused in the coastal ranges and mountains, along with Southern California," said Brad Pugh, seasonal forecaster at the Climate Prediction Center of NOAA.

"Above-normal precipitation is favored for Kings County during February-March-April (FMA), but it's only a

slight tilt in the probabilities," he said. "The highest uncertainty in the FMA precipitation outlook is across Northern California where equal chances of below, near, or above-normal is forecast."

"Due to the slow start to the wet season, below-average precipitation, 50 to 75 percent of normal, has been observed (in the Central Valley) from October 1, 2023 to February 4, 2024," said Pugh. "After the recent, ongoing heavy precipitation (in early February), drier weather is forecast through mid-February. A return of a wet weather pattern is expected by late February. The February-March-April outlook favors above-normal precipitation for the southern half of California."

"This wet pattern is related to El Niño and enhanced onshore flow," he explained. "Forecast uncertainty increases later in the spring."

"The latest storm brought a much-needed increase in snowpack to the Sierra Nevada Mountains, said Pugh. "As of February 6, snow water equivalent is 83, 75, and 69 percent of normal for the northern, central, and southern Sierra, respectively. It is too early to tell what the final season snowpack will be with the remainder of February and March to go. Last year, the central and southern Sierra ended the season with SWE above 200 percent of normal. During 2021-2022, SWE (snow water equivalent) was well below average across the Sierra Nevada mountains."

NOAA's current climate predictions indicate that El Niño is still active,

*"Precipitation" continued on page 2*



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## PRESS RELEASE March 1, 2024

### County of Kings, Office of the District Attorney, Sarah M. Hacker

The Kings County District Attorney's Office announces that on February 20, 2024, Investigator Brett Ward joined the Kings County Rural Task Force as assist in the fight against agricultural related crimes and to assist the prosecution of rural crimes here in Kings County. Investigator Ward has been a law enforcement officer since 2016 when he joined the Lemoore Police Department. During his tenure at the Lemoore Police Department, Investigator Ward was assigned to the Major Crimes Task Force assisting with the investigation of violence, gang, and narcotics offenses. Investigator Ward came to the Kings County District Attorney's Office in 2022. Since then, he has been assigned to investigate prison crimes, real estate fraud, and child abduction cases. The District Attorney's Office is now proud to have Investigator Ward participate in protecting our economy and resources through the prevention and interdiction of rural crimes.

Investigator Ward is no stranger to the agricultural community. He is from Tulare County where his father serves on the Tulare County Sheriff's Posse. He has been involved in the equine community since 1995. And his wife currently owns an equine rehabilitation facility, CR Equine, LLC.

The Kings County District Attorney's Office is committed to the farming and livestock community in Kings County and surrounding areas. District Attorney Sarah Hacker acknowledges that we need to work together, form constructive relationships, and vigorously combat rural crimes to make our community better. 🌱



"Precipitation" continued from page 1

but that it has peaked. Based on cooler temperatures in the eastern Pacific Ocean, NOAA's expectation is that it will be replaced by El Niña later this year, possibly as early as summer, but more likely in the fall. However, early weather predictions have a way of changing.

NOAA's maps with its official forecasts for March through May, which were posted on its website on February 15, show California and most of the Western U.S. as having "equal chances" of above or below normal precipitation.

"The seasonal precipitation outlook is based on El Niño composites, dynamical model predictions such as the North American Multi-Model Ensemble, and long-term trends are also considered" said Pugh.

"Seasonal forecasts are not as accurate as the 10-14-day forecasts," said Brian Ochs, a forecaster with the National Weather Service in Hanford.

He explained that weather predictions start by studying the current weather patterns on the other side of the Pacific Ocean, "roughly around Guam and that area – anything past the (International Dateline).

"Recent precipitation would have been closer to average precipitation for this season except that a lot of the time, the storms were split up," said Ochs, adding that Northern California was hit hard by rain this season. "We had a lot of

rain systems as well in L.A. and San Diego."

He noted, however, that precipitation in Kings County has been "above average since late January."

### SNOWPACK VS. RAINFALL

"When we look at data, we look at the snowpack, not necessarily the rain on the valley floor," said Steve Haugen, watermaster for the Kings River Water Association. "The snowpack in the Sierras is 60 to 70 percent of what we expect it to be on April 1st. Typically at this time (late February), we are 70 to 75% of normal, so we are below normal on the snowpack."

The California Department of Water Resources (DWR) forecast suggests that the snowpack will be at 72% by April 1st, according to Haugen. "So if we were to have above average rainfall between now and April 1st, we could end up with average runoff."

The DWR forecast predicts a moderate runoff.

"If we get that, we could have pretty decent irrigation delivery because of the water we carried over from last year," he said, explaining that having a wet winter as we did last year could result in the same water allocation as last year. "That would not be the case if we had a dry winter last year."

Strong El Niño conditions don't guarantee a wet winter, said Haugen.

"When you look at the Southern Sier-

ra in El Niño years, you're going to have some really dry years and you're going to have some really wet years," he said.

### WATER ALLOCATION

On February 21, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation announced the initial water allocation for the Westlands Water District (WWD) would be 15% of the water the district is entitled to under their contracts.

"While this winter has brought some significant snow and rain in January and February, the state has received less precipitation and snow water content compared to average years and the previous winter, and anticipated water export restrictions in the spring due to environmental regulations likely caused (the Bureau of) Reclamation to be more conservative in their initial allocation this year," reported the WWD in a press release.

Elizabeth Jonasson, deputy general manager of external affairs for WWD, said that the 15% allotment is based on precipitation through February 1st, and did not take into account the storms in February. She expects that there will be an increase based on the more recent precipitation numbers when the bureau announces the updated water allocation numbers on March 1st.

"Last year, the initial water allocation was 35%," she said. "It ended up being 100%." 🌱

# Farm Day is fast approaching

By Breanna Larman

*Where do leprechauns like to sit?  
In shamrocking chairs.*

The Spring event schedule is in full swing as we prepare for Farm Day March 14th. Welcoming 2,200 Kings County third grade students to the Kings Fairgrounds. We were very fortunate this year to have 3 generous sponsors of our 2024 event. Our presenting sponsor is Burriss Park Outdoor Education, and our Food and Beverage sponsorship is shared by Golden State Farm Credit and AgWest Farm Credit. A huge thank you to them for their support!

Next up to bat is our Membership Appreciate Night Wednesday April 10th at the Rawhide baseball field in Visalia were members, Friends of Farm Bureau and sponsors can receive FREE tickets to the game for their families and staff from KCFB. This event is sponsored by Lawrence Tractor for the second year in a row. Also happening in April, we will be expanding Farm Life to 16 pages! We are eager to lean into our platforms and stay a constant resource for SGMA updates, information and other valuable news for our membership.

May 30th, we have a new and exciting event at West Hills Lemoore. We are hosting a Water Forum panel discussion that will focus on SGMA in the Tulare Lake Subbasin. This discussion will include 4 panelists moderated by our Executive Director Dusty Ference. Prior to the discussion, there will be a trade show for attendees to peruse while they enjoy coffee and pastries.

On February 22nd the KCFB staff closed the office until further notice due to a water leak. If you need assistance or have questions about an upcoming event please contact me, Breanna at blarman@kcfb.org or at 559-584-3557. 📧



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**9-10am**  
Trade Show, Coffee and Pastries

**10-12pm**  
Discussion

**Event panel speakers:**  
Tulare Sub-Basin GSA Directors  
Deanna Jackson, Dennis Mills,  
and Jeff Wryick

*“SGMA” continued from page 1*

for landowners to learn more about the MKRGSA budget and plans for the future.

In 2018, landowners in the South Fork Kings Groundwater Sustainability (SFKGSA) approved a Prop. 218 election that ended in 2023. Since June 2023, the SFKGSAs has proposed three Prop. 218 elections to continue funding the GSA. On February 29, the GSA held a public hearing on its third attempt to pass a new assessment. Voters of that GSA approved an annual assessment of \$9.80 per acre. During that meeting, the directors of the GSA stated that an assessment of \$9.80 per acre is a starting point and funds only basic administration of the agency.

The SFKGSAs held a Special Meeting of the Board of Directors after the public

hearing. The agenda included an action item approving a master service agreement between the SFKGSAs and the Kings River Conservation District (KRCDD) authorizing the management of the administrative needs of the SFKGSAs on an interim basis. The need for interim management is a result of the board’s decision to place the GSA’s General Manager on administrative leave earlier this year.

The SFKGSAs board of directors also received an engineering report highlighting possible groundwater sustainability plan (GSP) updates. The board will consider GSP updates for consideration by the SWRCB during its March 14th meeting. 📧



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## Ag Commissioner's Compliance Report



Jimmy Hook,  
Agricultural  
Commissioner/Sealer

## New restrictions to the rodenticide Diphacinone

Contributed by Mario Gutierrez

Assembly Bill 1322 (AB 1322), a legislative initiative effective January 1, 2024, aimed at regulating the use of diphacinone, a rodenticide, has sparked significant debate and garnered attention from environmentalists, public health advocates, and agricultural stakeholders alike. Introduced in response to growing concerns over potential adverse effects of diphacinone on non-target wildlife and ecosystems, the bill seeks to impose stricter regulations on its usage, distribution, and sale within the state.

The use of rodenticides often provides the most successful and cost-effective tool for managing rodent pests. Diphacinone, a first-generation anticoagulant rodenticide, has been widely utilized for decades to control rodent populations in various settings, including agricultural fields, residential areas, and commercial properties. Rodents can affect agriculture by consuming agriculture products, damaging plants, equipment, and irrigation systems. They also pose health risks through contamination of food processing facilities, causing food safety hazards. While effective and significant in managing rodent infestation (populations), its prolonged use has raised environmental and public health concerns.

One of the primary concerns associated with diphacinone is its toxicity to non-target species, particularly birds of prey and mammals that inadvertently consume rodents controlled by the product. Secondary exposure to diphacinone through predation or scavenging can lead to severe health complications and mortality in wildlife populations, including endangered species such as owls, hawks, and foxes. Moreover, the proponents of the bill believe diphacinone's persistence in the environment further compounds its impact, posing long-term risk to ecosystems and biodiversity.

In response to these concerns, AB 1322 proposes several key provisions to address the potential adverse effects of diphacinone and promote safer alternatives for rodent control. Among the notable provisions are:

1. **Restrictions on Retail Sale:** The bill imposes restrictions on

the retail sale of diphacinone based rodenticides, limiting access to licensed pest control professionals and certified applicators, by making diphacinone a restricted material and prohibiting uses. For example, these prohibitions include residential or home uses and most industrial and institutional uses. By controlling the distribution of these products, the legislation aims to reduce the risk of misuse and unintended exposure to wildlife.

2. **Enhanced labeling Requirements:** To improve awareness among consumers and applicators, AB 1322 mandates enhanced labeling requirements for diphacinone products. Clear and prominent labeling will include information on proper use, potential hazards, and guidelines for sale disposal, allowing users to make informed decisions and minimize environmental impacts. The definition of "Wildlife habitat area" was expanded to include any park or wildlife refuge managed by a state or regional government agency. Also, aboveground applications would be eliminated in rangeland, pastureland, and fallow land.

3. **Promotion of Alternative Meth-**

ods: Recognizing the need for sustainable rodent practices, the bill encourages the adoption of alternative methods and non-toxic alternatives to diphacinone. Integrated pest management strategies, such as habitat modification, exclusion techniques, and biological control agents, offer effective solutions while minimizing harm to wildlife and ecosystems.

4. **Monitoring and Enforcement:** To ensure compliance with the new regulations, AB 1322 established monitoring mechanisms and enforcement measures, regulatory agencies will oversee the implementation of the diphacinone restrictions and take enforcement action against violations of prohibited uses. Regular monitoring of rodenticide uses, and environmental impacts will inform future policy decisions and conservation efforts.

All currently registered rodenticides are under review, these include first-generation anticoagulants (chlorophacinone, diphacinone, and warfarin), second-generation anticoagulants (brodifacoum, bromadiolone, difethialone, and difenacoum), zinc

*Ag Commissioner's Compliance Report continued on page 11*

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# Kings County Rural Crime Report

Contributed by Detective Dakotah Fausnett

The Kings County Sheriff's Office Rural Crime Task Force is currently conducting several investigations. February:

Throughout the month of February, the Kings County Rural Crimes Task Force has continued to stay busy investigating copper wire, bee theft and fraud cases. Boswell had two quads stolen possibly in the month of

December but it was just recently reported so we are currently looking into this. This past month we have worked copper wire thefts alongside TCSO and have identified two groups involved. The suspects are coming from Tulare County and are targeting the northeast and southeast side of the county. We also got into a pursuit last week after we had our bait trailer and quad stolen. The driver was able to escape after he abandoned the stolen truck in a ponding basin north of London. Ag detectives are still currently working on the above-mentioned cases by writing search warrants for phones and geofence warrants.

We continue to investigate all Ag related thefts and encourage members to call and report all Ag related crimes. If we do not receive calls from our members and community we may not be aware of certain crimes occurring in your area. 🙌



Detective Fausnett : (559) 639-8704  
 Detective Thomas: (559) 530-1701  
 Detective Holt: (559) 362-8928  
 Detective Coghlan: (559) 362-3078

*Ag Commissioner's Compliance Report continued from page 7*

phosphide, strychnine, bromethalin, and cholecalciferol. Although all rodenticides are under review, products such as chlorophacinone are still labeled for some uses, now prohibited under AB1322 for diphacinone.

While proponents of AB 1322 feel these restrictions represent a significant step towards mitigating the environmental and public health risks associated with dichacinone, rodenticides are important in management and are often included within Integrated Pest Management programs designed to mitigate rodent damage and health risks. AB 1322 implementation and effectiveness will depend on collaboration between government agencies, industry stakeholders, and the public. Should you have questions or need additional information please contact the Kings County Agricultural Commission/Sealer office at 559-852-2830. 🙌

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