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California

Effort to restore San Joaquin River endures during drought

FRESNO, Calif. (AP) — A multi-billion dollar project to bring salmon back to a dried-up section of California's second-longest river is moving forward despite the state's historic drought and complaints from some farmers who reluctantly agreed to give up some of their water allotments to support the effort.

Federal biologists say the San Joaquin River Restoration Program is yielding valuable information about spawning conditions in a part of the river where salmon hadn't been seen for almost 60 years and that suspending the project now would mean sacrificing hundreds of young fish, The Fresno Bee reported Sunday.

"We learned a lot last year about this river in a drought," U.S. Bureau of Reclamation fish biologist Don Portz told the newspaper. "We know a lot more about where the fish are in the river and what they need to survive in this river."

The 6-year-old project resulted from a legal settlement between the Natural Resources Defense Council, an environmental group, and the Bureau of Reclamation. The environmental group

sued the bureau in 1988 over claims that the government violated state wildlife laws when it erected Friant Dam near Fresno in the late 1940s and diverted water that had allowed salmon to run on the San Joaquin.

Now that California is in the grips of a record drought, some farmers think the project needs to be re-evaluated in the context of other priorities, according to The Bee. Kole Upton, a member of the Chowchilla Water District board who grows wheat, cotton, almonds and other crops, said reviving the 60 miles of river that have gone dry will deplete about 300,000 acres of farmland.

"If society values a few salmon over that much agriculture, I guess that's what we have to live with," he says. "But it will be a huge cost to the Valley, not to mention billions of dollars to complete this project. Is that reasonable?"

The drought has kept the bureau from releasing water specifically for the river restoration for more than a year. So far, the fledgling salmon populations have survived on water directed to farmers,

including a larger than usual release last year from a reservoir north of Fresno that was tapped to supply growers who were unable to get their usual allocations from the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta, the Bee said.

"A few people might have thought it was for fish," Portz said. "It wasn't."

To revive the salmon, he and his colleagues trap young fish on the river and truck them upstream so they can make their way to the Delta and eventually the Pacific Ocean. Last year, they captured trapped 2,393 fish, but this year the number has dropped to 561. Portz thinks the salmon have succumbed to the appetites of river bass and warmer water.

The cost of the project is expected to include the construction of bypass channels that would allow the salmon to travel to the Pacific Ocean and back to the river for spawning.

"The goal is to work together to restore a swimmable and fishable river that flows past farms and communities," Natural Resources Defense Council senior scientist Monty Schmitt said.

1,500 curtailment notices likely only the beginning, officials say

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — The stop-diversion orders that went out to more than 1,500 California water right holders last week were likely only the beginning in a spring and summer of curtailments, state officials say.

Curtailment notices were sent to about 1,474 individuals and entities using about 2,981 water rights in the San Joaquin River watershed and another 137 people and entities using 162 water rights on the Scott River in Siskiyou County.

The people sent curtailment notices on April 23 represent a fraction of the 38,000 landowners, water districts and other entities who were warned this year by the state Water Resources Control Board that their water rights could be restricted amid a fourth straight year of drought.

It is now likely that future shutoff orders could include some water users with pre-1914 rights — those rights with highest priority established before the state began issuing permits.

"More curtailments are coming," said George Kostyrko, a water board spokesman. "It is likely that some seniors on some watersheds will be affected at some point by summer. We just don't know (how many) quite yet."

The stop-diversion notices portend a repeat of last year, when curtailments impacted more than 5,000 water rights, according to the board. While the curtailments predominantly affect agriculture, they also apply to water rights held by municipalities and other water users, officials have explained.

If dry conditions continue through the spring, curtail-



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

A full canal takes water to customers of the Anderson Cottonwood Irrigation District south of Redding, Calif., which is among settlement contractors expecting as much as 75 percent of their normal allocation this year. Stop-diversion orders were issued to some 1,500 junior right holders last week.

ments are likely in certain watersheds on all post-1914 water rights. If there still isn't enough water to go around, officials would begin curtailing senior rights by working "backward by date," water board spokesman Tim Moran said recently.

The San Joaquin River watershed covers almost 16,000 square miles and includes the Stanislaus, the Tuolumne, and the Merced rivers, and other tributaries.

Curtailments are based on the most recent reservoir storage levels and inflow projections as well as forecasts for future precipitation, the board explained in a news release. Water right holders under a curtailment can still access water previously stored for them in reservoirs, use groundwater or purchase water.

Violations of curtailment orders can bring fines of up to \$1,000 per day and \$2,500 per acre-feet of water as well as prosecution, the state warns.

In other water developments:

- The water board's top water rights official approved requests from the state and federal water projects to allow more efficient transfers of water south of the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta, the agency announced in a news release.
- The approval, similar to those granted in previous years, involves 20 water rights requesting to transfer up to 335,560 acre-feet of water through multiple exchanges in an effort to send water where it's needed most. All the transfers would be south of the Delta. Last year's transfer request was for 277,863 acre-feet.
- The U.S. Drought Monitor map was changed last week to show the Northern Sierra to be at the worst level of drought because of the nearly non-existent snowpack. The severity of drought in a given area can affect levels of aid provided to ranchers.

FFA students ponder paths at conference career fair

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

FRESNO, Calif. — Drew Backe had a familiar feeling when he and another FFA member tried their hand with a crosscut saw at a career fair here.

Backe, a high school junior from Falbrook, Calif., is looking into the forestry program at California Polytechnic University-San Luis Obispo.

But he isn't sure what he wants to do for a career, so the 60 booths at the career fair he attended April 20 helped give him some ideas.

"There's a lot of stuff to look through, a lot of opportunities," he said.

Backe was one of about 5,000 attendees of the 47th annual California FFA Leadership Conference, held April 18-21 in Fresno. Many of the students browsed through the university and company booths during the career fair.

California community colleges and university ag programs were joined by such out-of-state entries as Iowa State University and Utah State University as well as companies such as Nutrena CropScience and Brandt Agricultural Products.

While some career fairs focus on connecting students with jobs after college, this one was geared to simply motivating high school students to think about their futures, said Kelsey Dugan, a California State University-Fresno student who organized the ca-



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

FFA member Jennifer Fisk (left) of Auburn, Calif., talks with Jessica Patrick, a student at Shasta College in Redding Calif., during a career fair April 20 at the state FFA convention in Fresno.

reer show.

"This is a great networking opportunity," Dugan said. "It's to get to know people and communicate with each other, to meet people in the industry, and from there they can successfully integrate into the university or to working."

The Fresno-based Brandt has recruited several student interns over the years, but company representatives mainly wanted to encourage youngsters to consider careers in agriculture, they said.

"My children are very involved in FFA, and I was in FFA in high school," sales coordinator Tracy Starich said. "It's a great organization. We want to be here to support the kids who want to stay in agriculture."

Most college and university booths featured students, many of whom had been in FFA in high school. Shelby Fields, an Iowa State animal science major from Newman, Calif., said she wanted young-

sters to be aware of opportunities in the Midwest.

"I came to this all four years in high school and I was highly involved in FFA, was a sectional officer," Fields said. "I think it's really beneficial. It opens eyes to all the universities and their agricultural programs. It opens the doors for networking."

FFA member Jennifer Fisk of Auburn, Calif., has already chosen a university. She's a freshman at University of Nevada-Reno, but returned to the career fair this year to keep networking with people.

"Each of the colleges offer their own particular niche," she said, adding the career fair gives members a chance "to speak with them directly."

High school junior Tyler Pruett of Stockton, Calif., said he discovered an interest in being a mechanic while helping his dad restore a 1969 Camaro. He was practicing with a drill at a station hosted by the technical program at Reedley College in Reedley, Calif.

"Working on mechanical stuff helps me express myself in a way," Pruett said. "This is my third year here, and all the mechanical stuff is what catches my attention."

Helping the students find their niche is what the career fair is about.

"I think it gets them thinking earlier about their career and what they want to do," said Sarah Tweeten, an agriculture communications student at Iowa State.

Awards, scholarships given at California FFA conference

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

FRESNO, Calif. — A bevy of proficiency awards and scholarships were given out during the 87th annual California FFA Leadership Conference, held April 18-21 at the convention center complex downtown.

Here are the state proficiency award winners:

Agricultural Communications: Amber Bjerra, San Luis Obispo
Agricultural Education: Cassidy Lane, Lone Pine
Agricultural Mechanics Design/Fabrication: Michael Dorado, Madera
Agricultural Mechanics Energy Systems: Brett Umstead, King City
Agricultural Mechanics Repair/Maintenance Entrepreneurship: Andrew Holemo, Falbrook
Agricultural Mechanics Repair/Maintenance Placement: Tyler Meador, Morro Bay
Agricultural Processing: Isaac Varela, Falbrook
Agricultural Sales Entrepreneurship: Blake Jackson, El Capitan
Agricultural Sales Placement: Tyler Butler, Las Plumas
Agricultural Services: Jeffery Gaylord, Hughson
Agriculture Research-Animal Systems: Wade Sousa, Tulare
Agriculture Research-Integrated System: Sadie Whempner, Elk Grove
Agriculture Research-Plant Systems: Bailee Rusconi, King City
Beef Production Entrepreneurship: Jessica Judge, San Luis Obispo
Beef Production Placement: Robert Daley, Las

Plumas
Dairy Production Entrepreneurship: Carly Olufs, Petaluma
Dairy Production Placement: Daniel Moules, Tokay
Diversified Agricultural Production: Kennedy Wagner, El Capitan
Diversified Crop Production Entrepreneurship: Saul Armenta, King City
Diversified Crop Production Placement: Taylor Coffman, Laton
Diversified Horticulture: Quinn Shippey, Madera
Diversified Livestock: Robert Mattes, Minarets
Emerging Agricultural Technology: Garrett Maciel, King City
Environmental Science/Nat Resources: Paul Barcellos, Tulare
Equine Science Entrepreneurship: Kai Brown, Nipomo
Equine Science Placement: Tanner Lopez, Minarets
Fiber/Oil Crops: Miguel Lua, San Luis Obispo
Forage Production: Virat Kang, Madera
Forest Management/Products: Jacob Eyraud, Poway
Goat Production: Nicole Hobby, Hughson
Grain Production Entrepreneurship: Kent Norman, Ripon
Home and/or Community Development: Emily Ann Martinez, Galt
Landscape Management: Sebastian Aguirre, Merrill West
Nursery Operation: Manibeth Villanueva, Minarets
Outdoor Recreation: Kiana Almaguer, King City
Pomology Production: Veronica Viramontes, Lodi
Poultry Production: Marc Abdallah, Gustine
Sheep Production: Bridgette Eldridge, Winters
Small Animal Production and Care: Kelley Mellott, Lemoore
Specialty Animal Production: Victor Johnson, Lemoore
Specialty Crop Production: Bryce Umbarger, King City
Swine Production Entrepreneurship: Vanessa Soto, Templeton
Swine Production Placement: Amber Thompson, Heritage

Turf Grass Management: Michelle Utterback, Pleasant Grove
Vegetable Production: Mitchell Gander, East Nicolaus
Veterinary Medicine: Madalyn Vieira, Tulare
Viticulture Production: Logan Engelman, Fresno-Central
Wildlife Management: Logan Douglas, Oakdale
Here are the 2015 scholarship finalists:
Actagro Scholarship: Kaitlin Cagle, Elk Grove-Pleasant Grove; Kayleen Kemp, Fortuna
Almond Board Scholarship: Alonso Garcia Razo, Hollister; Kelley Rene Mellott, Lemoore; Emilio Smith, Las Plumas; Hannah Van Dyk, Tulare
Jerry L. Biggs Memorial Scholarship: Jenae Hansen, Madera
Betty Bushong Memorial Scholarship: Robert Daley, Las Plumas; Dustin Suttles, Lakeside-El Capitan
Jerry T. Davis Honorary Scholarship: Kelcie Jones, Bakersfield-Frontier
Friends of the FFA Scholarship: Regina Gutierrez, East Nicolaus
Paul Freitas Memorial Scholarship: Karlee Dombush, Lincoln
Hartford Insurance Scholarship: Hunter Allen, Las Plumas; Katherine White, Hollister
Mabel W. Jacks Memorial Scholarship: Abigail Brown, Red Bluff; Emma Pierson, Santa Rosa; Andrew Sousa, Tulare
Byron J. McMahon Memorial Scholarship: Kaylee Santos, Tulare
Dorothy McMillan Memorial Scholarship: Matthew Turcotte, East Nicolaus
Dean McNeilly Scholarship: Jenna Baxter, Half Moon Bay
Jaimie Lynne Petty Memorial Scholarship: Josh Mendez, Santa Maria; Natalie Starich, Hanford; Ashley Utz, Half Moon Bay
The Willey Family Scholarship: Henry Jake Bones, Fortuna; Cole Lauchland, Lodi
Zenith Insurance Co. Scholarship: Sarah Dreyer, Exeter; Kylee Hagan, Rio Vista; Mallory Harrison, Bakersfield-Frontier; Virat Kang, Madera-South



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