The San Joaquin Valley Drainage Implementation Program

Drainage Management Strategy

Approved by SJVDIP Management Group
October 6, 2000

SJVDIP Member agencies

Department of Water Resources
Department of Food and Agriculture
Department of Fish and Game
State Water Resources Control Board
U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service
U. S. Geological Survey
U. S. Natural Resources Conservation Service
U. S. Bureau of Reclamation

1. Introduction

The San Joaquin Valley Drainage Implementation Program was formed in 1991 when a Memorandum of Understanding was signed by eight agencies including DWR, DFG, DFA, SWRCB, the Bureau, USDA-NRCS, USFWS, and USGS. The purpose of the 1991 MOU and its Implementation Strategy document was to coordinate agency programs to implement the 1990 Drainage Management Plan recommendations. The role of agencies was to provide technical and financial support, and the districts were expected to implement the 1990 Plan recommendations. No assurances were specified for implementation and no central funding was created. Agencies were committed to coordinating programs and budgets.

In 1997 an Activity Plan was initiated by SJVDIP and University of California to review and evaluate the 1990 Plan and update its recommendations. The Activity Plan was intended to review the information collected since 1990 and update the Plan as necessary. The Activity is consistent with the 1990 Management Plan's recognition that the plan be updated from time to time as monitoring, additional studies, and local actions reveal new facts, as well as the 1991 Implementation Strategy which states that " . . . Management Group will sponsor an effort to periodically update the Management Plan."

The Activity Plan consisted of three phases: Phase I was a technical evaluation of drainage options by technical committees and a concurrent evaluation and assessment of the 1990 Plan implementation by three subarea committees. Each of the eight Technical Committees worked on one drainage management option and produced a report. Each of the three subarea committees worked on one subarea and prepared its own report. This phase was completed in 1998-99. Phase II was formation of an Ad Hoc Coordination Committee consisting of chairs of the technical committees from Phase I along with agency staff and other stakeholders. The AHCC reviewed, analyzed and synthesized the information from Phase I into a report published in January 2000 completing Phase II. The Activity Plan defines Phase III as follows: "Use Phase II AHCC Report recommendations along with public input to formulate an updated Management Plan and identify mechanisms conducive to voluntary implementation of the updated Plan". Instead, Phase III will implement AHCC recommendations consistent with the 1990 plan.

2. Background

The 1990 Plan proposed in-valley management of drainage problems through 2040 and assumed that actions contained within the plan would be implemented to keep farming viable in the valley. To date, some of the 1990 plan recommendations have been implemented and some have not been implemented and as a result acreage of drainage impacted lands has grown.

- New information on in-valley drainage management has been developed and significant progress has been made in further development of the 1990 Plan drainage management concepts. This information is presented in eight Technical Committee reports, three Subarea reports, and the 2000 AHCC Report.
- Implementation of projects suggested in the AHCC is expected to provide substantial in-valley drainage relief and its implementation will be a test of the adequacy of in-valley management options to provide necessary drainage relief, assuming implementation occurs in the near future and at a rate that reduces the acreage of drainage impacted lands.
- The AHCC report addresses the in-valley options, but it recommends that complimentary to in-valley drainage management, planning should be initiated on environmentally safe methods of salt disposal, including out-of-valley alternatives.
- Investigation of out-of-valley disposal was conducted in the 1960's, 1970's and 1980's. None of these efforts included a thorough investigation of alternatives for management and ultimate disposal of salt. The San Joaquin Valley Drainage Program that produced the 1990 Plan, although recognizing the possible need for out-of-valley disposal in the future, but made a policy decision to limit the scope of its plan to in-valley drainage management options. The focus did not address the ultimate issue of salt balance or end point for salts. Thus a clear permanent solution doesn't exist at the present time.
- The San Joaquin Valley Drainage Program Strategy is still valid in that economic and environmental feasibility of any future out-of -valley disposal will depend on further implementation of in-valley management options including those recommended in the 1990 Plan, the 2000 AHCC Report, and other potential in-valley options.
- CVRWQCB Basin Plan update is currently underway and there is a potential for new and more restrictive water quality objectives for salinity and boron in the River. If more restricted salinity and boron objectives are established, the opportunity for drainage discharge to the San Joaquin River could become more limited.
- CVRWQCB Drainage Policy in its Resolution No. 96-147 states "The Regional Board, at this time, feels that a valley-wide drain will be the only feasible long-term solution for achieving salt balance in the Central Valley". The Board favors the construction of a valley-wide drain under conditions that include protecting beneficial uses from toxicants, regulation of discharges under permit, and long term biological monitoring.
- SWRCB 1995 Bay-Delta Water Quality Control Plan recognizes the need for achieving salt balance in the Valley and recommends that necessary studies be conducted.
- SWRCB Bay-Delta Decision 1641 amends CVP water rights permits to require that USBR meet the 1995 Bay-Delta Plan salinity objectives at Vernalis.
- The 9th Circuit Appeals Court opinion on February 4th regarding Firebaugh vs. U.S. determined that "although the district court can compel the Department of the Interior to provide drainage service as mandated by the San Luis Act, the district court cannot eliminate agency discretion as to how it satisfies the drainage requirement."

- The Grassland Area Farmers, a coalition of federal and exchange water contractors in the Grassland subarea, have formed a regional drainage entity under the San Luis Delta-Mendota Water Authority and developed a long-term drainage management plan. USBR and the SLD-MWA have signed a use agreement to utilize a portion of the San Luis Drain and have executed a cooperative agreement to prepare an EIS/EIR.
- The San Joaquin Valley Drainage Authority (including districts in Grassland, Westlands, and Tulare subareas) has been formed to develop a long-term solution for drainage problems in the Valley, including out-of-valley disposal.
- An MOU has been signed by SWRCB and Westlands Water District to develop alternatives for a long-term drainage solution including all in-valley options and out-of-valley disposal options.
- Department of the Interior (DOI) Undersecretary David Hayes, in a letter dated June 16, 2000 to certain members of Congress, declared that DOI is no longer participating in the SWRCB/WWD MOU and EIR process. However, DOI is prepared to work with other agencies and local districts "to formulate and implement environmentally sound, fiscally responsible, and sustainable solutions to drainage problems."

3. Phase III Strategy-

(i) SJVDIP will pursue early implementation of projects identified in the AHCC report that provide optimal drainage service and relief, and provide incentives for voluntary implementation. The goal is to give priority to on-site projects that will maintain agricultural productivity and help protect fish and wildlife resources. In cooperation with local entities, alternative subarea specific projects consistent with the 1990 Plan, TC, and AHCC reports, should be developed and implemented.

(ii) Consistent with specific recommendations in the 1990 Management Plan, the SJVDIP supports the formation of regional drainage organizations and the planning initiatives of these organizations and member SJVDIP agencies. Necessary coordination efforts will be taken to complement efforts of these organizations and their initiatives and efforts. The SJVDIP continues to endorse the general practice spelled out on page 60 of the 1991 Implementation Strategy which states that as a general practice of the continuing regional effort, " The Management Group should review and comment on definite plans, endorsing those aspects of definite plans which help to implement the SJVDP regional plan, and recognizing those facets of the definite planning which suggest that the regional plan should be revised."

(iii) Phase III requires more emphasis on partnerships to achieve problem resolution. Participation of environmental groups, and USFWS and DFG, is essential to advance projects that are protective of fish and wildlife resources. Necessary efforts will be made to encourage participation of all stakeholders including environmental organizations.

(iv) It is recognized that planning other alternatives for drainage management, specifically out-of-valley alternatives other than discharge to the San Joaquin River, will be covered under the alternatives development process being conducted by the SWRCB and WWD.

4. Phase III Definition

Purpose:
The 1990 Plan and 2000 AHCC Report will be used as the principal guide to continuously improve upon knowledge of drainage solutions and pursue implementation of feasible projects. Initial emphasis will be on the development of a framework agreement, and cooperative agreements among SJVDIP agencies and regional drainage organizations, local districts, and/or growers for the purpose of developing and advancing proposals and obtaining funds to implement appropriate AHCC recommendations. Phase III emphasis will be on drainage reduction, drainage treatment and reuse, and salt separation, utilization, and in-valley salt management. SJVDIP will work with agencies, districts, growers, and environmental groups to develop on-site drainage management projects that are conducive to voluntary implementation, and will help protect fish and wildlife resources and maintain agricultural productivity. This program will be coordinated with other drainage planning efforts.

Membership:
The 1991 Implementation Strategy identified an organizational structure that provided for representatives of subareas, districts, growers, and environmental organizations to participate in SJVDIP activities, and provide input to the MG. This structure dissolved over time and in part was never fully realized at all. The Management Group will seek to re-engage all SJVDIP member agencies and stakeholders and implement a coordination and input process to ensure active participation and collective focus on drainage management solutions.

Roles:
Agencies will coordinate programs, budgets, and proposal submissions in support of recommendations in the AHCC and Subarea reports. Agencies and/or districts, in cooperation with stakeholders, will coordinate development of plans to implement feasible AHCC correlated actions. Project plans would be reviewed and endorsed by stakeholders and SJVDIP agencies. Agencies would provide technical and financial support for planning, implementation and monitoring of actions that are regional and have public benefit. Districts and growers will develop Subarea-specific project plans, and participate in all phases of planning, implementation, financing, and monitoring.

Assurances:
SJVDIP will recommend the endorsed plans for funding through agency grants and loan programs.

Funding:

SJVDIP agencies, local districts, and environmental groups will seek support from CALFED Water Quality and Water Use Efficiency programs and other funding sources, specifically Proposition 13, Proposition 204, and other potential sources.

5. Phase III Steps

Step 1- Immediate Actions to Implement Phase III

a. Focus on implementation of the recommendations of the 1990 Plan and the AHCC Report.
b. Provide for participation of agencies, growers, districts, and environmental stakeholders in a Drainage Advisory Committee for in-valley solutions.
c. Invite university scientists and subarea and environmental representatives to participate in drainage management project planning.
d. Work with agencies and districts to develop cooperative agreements to fund project feasibility studies.
e. Work with districts and growers to develop draft project proposals for review and endorsement by SJVDIP including potential benefits, conflicts, resolutions, estimated costs, possible funding sources, required legislation, and environmental documentation for each proposed project.
f. Hold informational public workshops as necessary to advance public acceptance of proposed projects and SJVDIP activities.
g. Coordinate with the CVRWQCB on the control of salinity, boron, selenium, and other trace elements and participate as appropriate in workshops and stakeholder meetings.

Step 2 – Short-Term Actions to Implement Phase III

a. If appropriate or necessary, initiate modifications to the 1991 MOU (strategy, purpose, membership, roles, assurances, funding)
b. Coordinate SJVDIP activities with ongoing initiatives and programs (SWRCB/ WWD planning process, SJVDA efforts, SLD-MWA/USBR EIS/EIR, CALFED, CVRWQCB Basin planning, etc.)
c. Develop a valley-wide coordination structure for project implementation, research promotion, and technology transfer

Step 3 – Long-Term Actions to Implement Phase III

a. Participate in the environmental review process, if needed, to implement any projects developed from TC and AHCC recommendations.
b. Recommend to SJVDIP agencies and CALFED agencies, as appropriate to their mission, to fund the projects that were endorsed by SJVDIP and complete the environmental review process.

c. Begin the process to evaluate the feasibility of in-valley alternatives to sustain agricultural productivity and environmental quality in perpetuity. Base the evaluation on soil productivity, economic factors, improvements in soil and water quality (including surface and groundwater), reduction in rates of soil salinization, rates of remediation of toxic trace elements, improvements in ecological functions and other appropriate indices. Coordinate this study with other agencies and organizations' drainage planning efforts.

d. Establish periodic, comprehensive updates of the 1990 Plan.