

EID CRAWFORD DITCH

GJ 04-001

Reason for the Report

The Grand Jury received a complaint regarding the misuse of water resources, over allocation of water meters and preferential treatment of large landowners and developers by the El Dorado Irrigation District, hereafter referred to as EID.

Scope of Investigation

People Interviewed

- Former member of EID engineering staff
- EID Ditch System Supervisor
- EID General Manager

Documents Reviewed

- EID internal memos, e-mails, newspaper articles, other agency reports, personnel action records, transcribed interviews and employee personal journals
- EID prepared binder with maps, flow data, revenue data, Power Point presentation transcripts, legal briefs and historical data related to ditch systems and particularly the Crawford Ditch.

Physical Inspection

- EID guided tour of Crawford Ditch showing diversion dam, typical delivery apparatus to end users and repairs following a major side wall failure.

Background

The Grand Jury found the complaint as filed to be largely a matter of difference of opinion and perspective. Some of the issues raised were technically valid at one time, but have since been properly resolved by EID. The one exception is the issue related to the current operation of the Crawford Ditch. The Crawford Ditch is an enduring example of Gold Rush era technology. It operates today much as it did in the 1850's. It consists of 21 miles of open earthen ditch winding through the rugged and remote backcountry of our county. It begins at a diversion dam on the North fork of the Cosumnes River under a pre-1914 water right. Its purpose is to deliver untreated seasonal agricultural water.

Facts

1. Revenues from the ditch water customers average around \$10,000 per year.
2. Costs incurred by EID to keep the ditch operating total over \$100,000 in a typical year.
3. Sidewall collapses have occurred causing private property and environmental damage resulting in repairs and mitigation expenses costing EID millions of dollars.
4. Quantification of water diverted, delivered and lost (seepage, evaporation and theft) is extremely primitive. Several studies have been attempted with results that are less than

conclusive. These efforts have been characterized by EID as “educated guesses” at best. The studies do agree that those losses are high, ranging from 60% to 80%.

5. Due to contaminants picked up from its long journey in an open ditch over agricultural land, the remaining water can not be economically treated to potable standards. All efforts to do so ended in the early 1990’s.
6. Ditch water customers pay a flat rate per season based on the type of apparatus used to divert ditch water to their property. There is no actual quantification of water used and therefore no meaningful records.

Findings/Recommendations

1a. Finding: The Crawford Ditch loses money at roughly a 10 to 1 ratio. This results in the rate payers at large providing a 90% subsidy to the 44 Crawford Ditch customers.

1b. Recommendation: Adjust the fee schedule to more realistically reflect the cost of the service.

2a. Finding: Reliable data on water received at the source, water delivered to customers and water lost (seepage, evaporation and theft) does not presently exist. *See photo on page 21.*

2b. Recommendation: Install the metering hardware necessary to accurately quantify the water appropriated, sold and lost.

3a. Finding: The Ditch itself pollutes the water rendering it useless as a future potable water source, and the potential remains high for future sidewall failures requiring EID to pay large damage claims. Also, the lack of quantification, high percentage of loss and outright pollution of valuable water creates fertile ground for future legal challenges to our current water right.

3b. Recommendation: Embark on a plan to structurally upgrade from an open ditch to infrastructure consistent with current standards for water conveyance

In Conclusion

With the adoption of a General Plan our county is poised for a large population increase in a very compressed time frame. This makes our water resources all the more valuable. Any waste of water is truly undesirable and any loss of water right totally unacceptable.