

# **EARTH LOG: Filling in blanks on NY Times story about west side water treatment**

Posted by Mark Grossi on February 18, 2014 Updated 21 hours ago

The New York Times carried [an interesting story](#) about a solar desalination plant rising near Firebaugh on the west side of the San Joaquin Valley.

It was well-done, but long on technology and short on context for the Valley, so I will fill in the blanks. [My story on water treatment efforts in the area](#) published about a year ago.

Right next door to the solar desalination effort, there is a \$30 million federal experiment to clean up the nasty drainage of salts and metals from 97,000 acres of fertile Valley land.

The benefits of the solar plant and the federal experiment? It could save agriculture on land producing \$500 million of economic benefit.

The dirty water problem is related to the wildlife disaster in the 1980s when similar drainage from different farmers killed and maimed shorebirds at Kesterson Reservoir in Merced County.

The main villain in the drainage is called selenium, a trace element found in the soil on the west side.

The federal experiment is using reverse osmosis, which has failed in the past on the west side. It clogged and broke down. But advances, such as pre-treating the drainage to remove solids, have corrected the problems, engineers say.

If the technologies hold up, they could be a model for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to clean up tainted irrigation drainage on a broad scale on the Valley's west side.

Read more here: <http://www.fresnobee.com/2014/02/18/3777146/filling-in-blanks-on-ny-times.html#storylink=cpy>