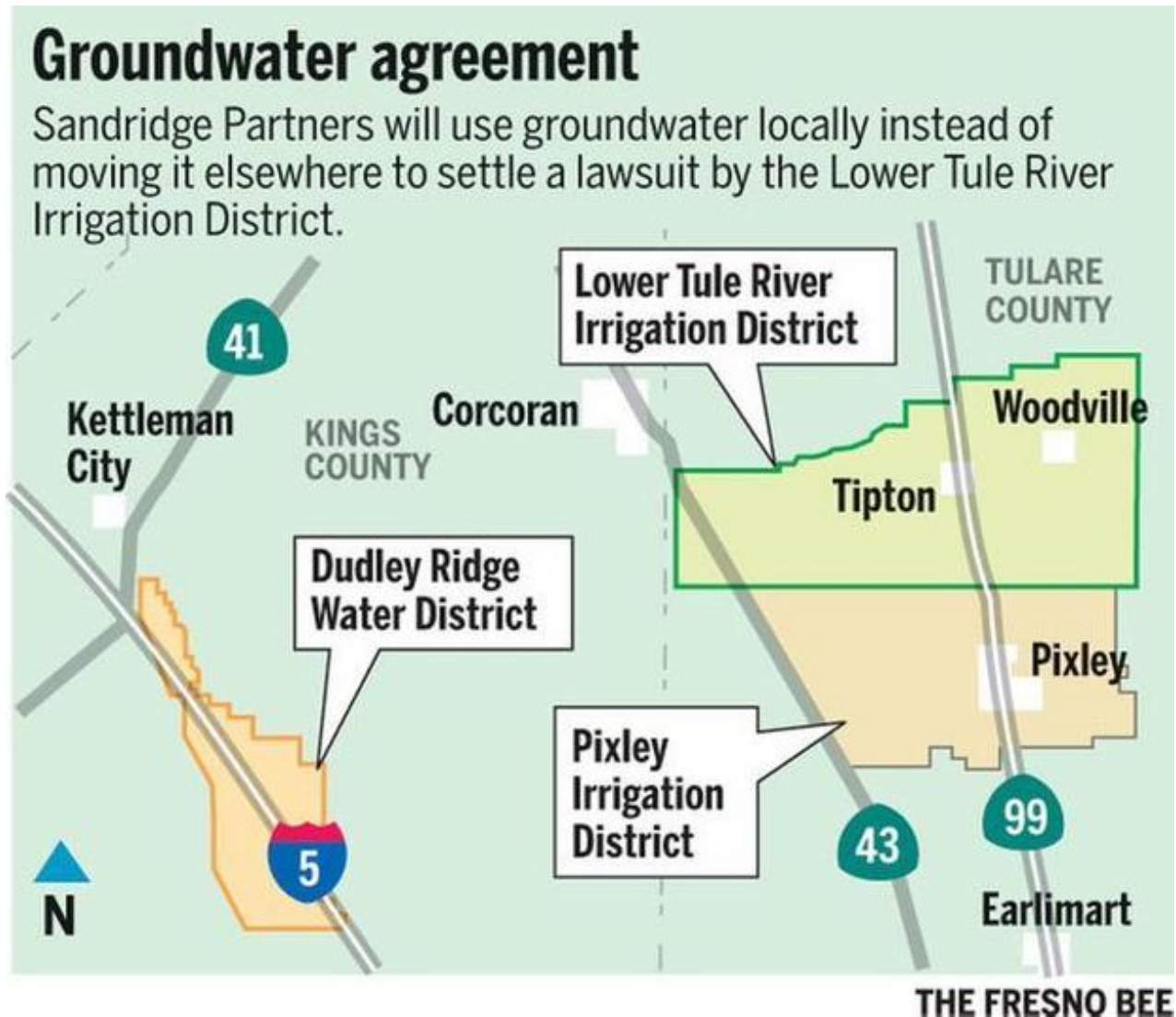


South Valley farming partners to limit water exports in deal with irrigation district

By Lewis Griswold

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A group that owns South Valley farmland has reached an out-of-court settlement with an irrigation district by agreeing to keep pumped groundwater within a specific area instead of exporting it across the Valley.

Sandridge Partners, which owns farmland in Tulare and Kings counties, met stiff opposition from the Tipton-based Lower Tule River Irrigation District by pumping groundwater from inside the district and moving it across the Valley to farmland nowhere near the district, [the irrigation district said in a lawsuit](#).

“We’re in a fourth year of drought,” Lower Tule general manager Dan Vink said. “The board of directors is saying, ‘we don’t have enough to go around.’”

The district argued that groundwater is in a state of overdraft, and [a judge last year ordered a halt](#) to the practice until a trial could be held. It was scheduled to begin this week.

But Tulare County Superior Court Judge Bret Hillman on Tuesday signed the out-of-court settlement reached late last week, a move that gives it the force of a court order and could serve as an example of how to settle a contentious groundwater dispute in a drought.

Sandridge owns 940 acres in southern Tulare County on its Valov ranch property near Angiola. About half is inside the Lower Tule River Irrigation District.

Lower Tule said Sandridge had been pumping water inside district boundaries and moving it west to lands it owns in Dudley Ridge Water District south of Kettleman City.

Under the agreement, Sandridge would keep pumped groundwater inside the [Tule sub-basin](#) south of Tulare.

Groundwater pumped at the Valov ranch inside the Lower Tule district would be used there, and groundwater pumped on ranch property outside the district could be used on neighboring Sandridge property — with a limit of 3 acre-feet of water per acre of fallowed Valov ranch land.

The district is “making sure it is at least protecting its supply in the basin,” said Lower Tule attorney Jennifer Spalleta of Lodi.

Attorney James Ardaiz of Fresno, representing Sandridge, said the partnership has the right to use groundwater for its farmlands.

Sandridge reached an agreement with Lower Tule because “our client wanted to be a good neighbor,” he said.

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