

Why are you seeing water in canals? It's a bump from spring storms

By Mark Grossi
mgrossi@fresnobee.com

More than a few of you have noticed water flowing in canals lately. Tuesday morning, the water flow in the San Joaquin River picked up.

All of a sudden, there's water? What happened to the desperate drought?

The drought is still on. The extra water came from a few storms in May and June.

The San Joaquin similarly swelled last year as the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation sent river water to west-side growers who have water rights dating back to the 1870s. The same thing is happening this year, though the story is a little different.

The destination of that water — about 70,000 acre-feet — was in dispute last week. East San Joaquin Valley farmers said they believed it was theirs, citing an agreement this year. The west-siders said the agreement had nothing to do with this additional water.

The Bureau of Reclamation decided to send the water down the river to the west-siders. [Check out](#) our earlier stories [for details](#).

'Death takes a holiday'

On Twitter this week, I wrote "Death takes a holiday," referring to [the nine-day streak](#) in July without an air-quality problem in the San Joaquin Valley. By the time you read this on Wednesday, it might be a 10-day streak.

This month usually hemorrhages with bad-air days. July is one of the big reasons the Valley leads the nation in exceeding the ozone standard over the last 15 years.

How bad has July been in the past? During a five-year period ending in 2006, there were only three July days when you could send your children out to play without worrying about ozone corrosion in their lungs

Ozone triggers lung problems, such as asthma. It also has been linked to early mortality.

But I've been seeing a few healthy days in July over the last five years. Last July, the Valley had an eight-day run of healthy air.

Is it a successful pollution cleanup or just a few cooler, breezy days? You can make a case either way, but please don't make the mistake of thinking the air is somehow OK now.

This region exceeded the eight-hour federal ozone standard more in June than Houston did all of last year. The Valley has had 35 this year so far, and ozone season can run well into October around here.

Warm, but not that warm

In Fresno, every month this year except May has been warmer than average in Fresno. But at least, it's not as warm as last year.

If you remember, every month in 2014 was among the 10 warmest on record in Fresno. I can't find another year quite like that in the records for Fresno.

This year, only two months made the top 10. June was the third warmest. And March set a record for March with an average temperature of 64 degrees, more than 7 degrees warmer than the average.

The pleasant month of May this year was below average. And, as of Sunday, July is slightly below average.

Another leadership change

A powerful farm water agency on the Valley's west side will have a change at the helm with the retirement of the only executive director it has ever had.

It is the second change of leadership at a major Valley water agency this year, but this one did not have a direct connection to California's drought.

Dan Nelson is retiring after 24 years as executive director of the [San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Authority](#). Jason Peltier, currently chief deputy general manager with Westlands Water District, will take over at the end of this year.

The authority represents water agencies involved with about 2.1 million acres of mostly federal farm water customers, though they include urban customers in the Santa Clara Valley and other locations.

The biggest customer represented in the authority is Westlands Water District, based mostly in west Fresno County.

Earlier this year during a drought-related shakeup, the general manager of the Friant Water Authority resigned. Friant works with thousands of east Valley farmers who buy federal water from Millerton Lake. There is no word yet on a replacement.

On the west side, Peltier is supposed to take over at the end of this year. His experience includes service as deputy assistant secretary for Water and Science at the U.S. Department of Interior.

Before working for Interior, he managed the Central Valley Project Water Association.

Mark Grossi: [559-441-6316](tel:559-441-6316), [@markgrossi](https://twitter.com/markgrossi)