

Drought makes way for water efficiency project

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Casey Christie / The Californian

The Calloway Canal is in the middle of a restoration project.

The drought has left most canals high and dry.

That's not a good thing, normally. But in the case of the Calloway Canal, it's worked out pretty well.

That's because the canal owner, North Kern Water Storage District, along with a few partners, has long wanted to line a portion of the Calloway with concrete to more efficiently move water around Kern County.

The project has been in the works for years as part of the Poso Creek Integrated Water Management group, which is made up of North Kern, Shafter-Wasco Irrigation District, Semitropic Water Storage District, Delano-Earlimart Irrigation District and the Kern-Tulare Water Storage District.

The Calloway Canal was built in 1879 and, other than a few alignment adjustments in the northwest to accommodate development, it hasn't changed much in the intervening years.

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By the numbers

The Calloway Canal is being lined from Coffee Road to Calloway Avenue.

15,000: yards of concrete being used

2.38: miles being lined

\$6.8 million: total cost

\$5 million: in state and federal grants

4,400: acre feet of water expected to be saved per year

The Calloway connects to the Kern River between Golden State Avenue and North Chester. It meanders west and north through Rosedale, paralleling the federal Friant-Kern Canal. You've probably noticed it near Lowes, at Coffee Road and Rosedale Highway.

It's mostly been used to carry Kern River water during high water years. But the recent improvements will likely increase its use dramatically.

Lining the Calloway was just part of the overall project. North Kern also established a spur that now connects the Calloway to the Cross Valley Canal.

That is going to be a very big deal, allowing the Calloway to carry state and federal water to northern Kern County farmlands.

"For Shafter-Wasco, we use San Joaquin River water," explained general manager Dana Munn. "After the water is run down that river for the salmon, it's recaptured. And some of that water belongs to Shafter-Wasco." But it's way up north near the San Luis Reservoir.

Getting it to Shafter-Wasco's farmers used to mean complicated swaps through the federal and state systems.

With this new intertie, Munn said, the water can be moved down the California Aqueduct, through the Cross Valley Canal and into the Calloway Canal.

And, again, now that a portion is lined, much less will be lost to seepage.

With water, though, nothing is one sided. Typically, one man's seepage is another man's recharge, so I wondered if any other water entities had heartburn over the loss of that seepage.

Turns out, for once, the answer is no. Even Bakersfield cheered the North Kern project.

North Kern didn't line the Calloway from its Kern River connection to the intertie at Coffee Road, so any water that runs down the eastern portion will still have losses and will therefore recharge the aquifer, said Bakersfield Water Resources Manager Art Chianello. And the city will get some capacity in the Calloway for possible future use.

"I think it was a really smart thing for North Kern to do," Chianello said. "They should be looking for ways to maximize their water supply."