

'...no one here's to blame but what about your quiet treason'

— Lyric source Page 9

THE SACRAMENTO VALLEY MIRROR

Ballot crime measure showdown

— Page 5

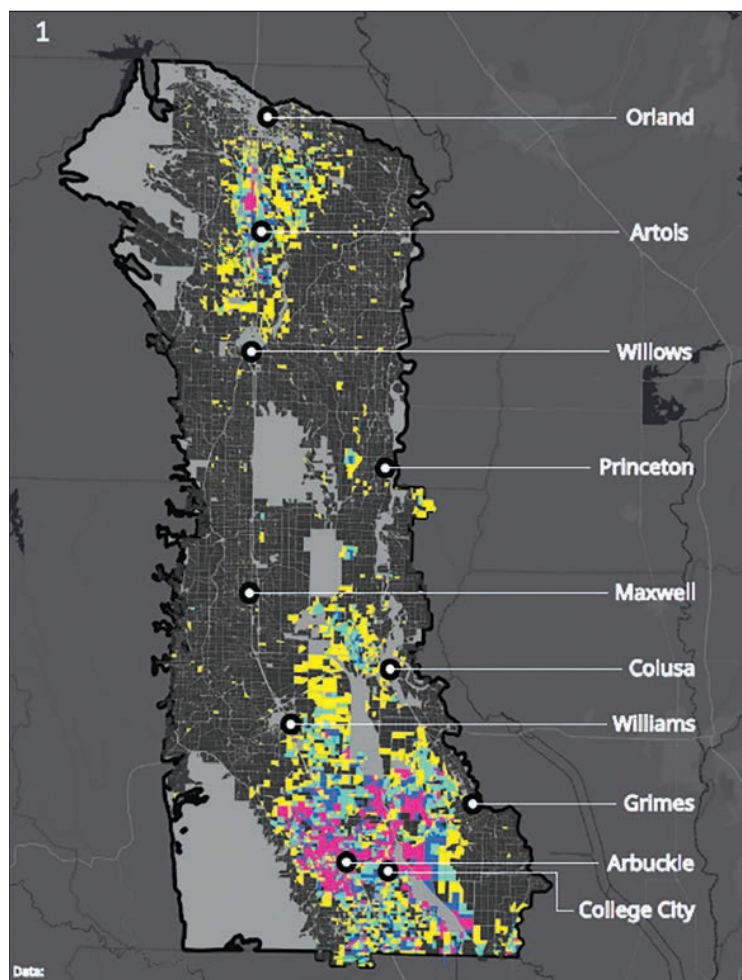
Glenn and Colusa groundwater agencies finalize new sustainability plan

Concerns persist about agriculture, domestic wells, and subsidence

By Todd Bishop
For the Valley Mirror
WILLOWS — Groundwa-

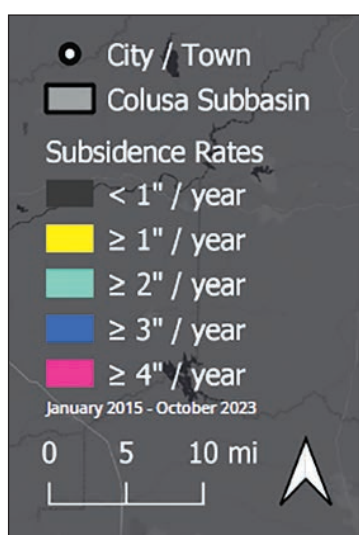
ter authorities in Glenn and Colusa counties unanimously adopted a revised regional

Subsidence in Agricultural Lands Within the Colusa Subbasin



Top: A map created by the public interest group AquAlliance shows areas of subsidence on agricultural land in Glenn and Colusa counties from January 2015 to October 2023, with the areas in pink (in Artois and Arbuckle) indicating that land has fallen by an average of more than 4 inches a year in those locations. (AquAlliance Graphic)

Right: An analysis of land use and subsidence in Glenn and Colusa counties by public interest group AquAlliance found the greatest levels of subsidence on agricultural land with deciduous trees, including walnut and almond orchards. (AquAlliance Graphic)



Groundwater Sustainability Plan on Friday, April 19, scrambling to meet a state-imposed deadline after their first attempt was turned down by California water regulators.

The Glenn Groundwater Authority and Colusa Groundwater Authority will try again to win state approval with new provisions intended to better address long-term land subsidence and risks to domestic wells, while raising the possibility of placing future limits on agricultural pumping.

Local growers expressed concern that the revised plan will impact their long-term ability to irrigate orchards and fields, ultimately making some ag operations economically unsustainable.

But critics said the plan doesn't move quickly and decisively enough to protect groundwater and address subsidence, the sinking of land in areas where water is pumped excessively.

The original version of the Colusa Subbasin Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP), which covers much of Glenn and Colusa counties, was submitted to the state Department of Water Resources (DWR) in January 2022. It was drafted by the Glenn Groundwater Authority and Colusa Groundwater Authority, as the Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) for the Colusa Subbasin.

This is part of a larger effort by the state to make groundwater subbasins in California sustainable by 2042, under California's Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA).

DWR deemed the original Colusa Subbasin GSP "incomplete" in October 2023. With that, local officials were given a 180-day window, ending this month, to address the identified deficiencies.

They are seeking to avoid an "inadequate" determination, which would bring the California State Water Re-

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Supes okay funds for two cities' rec uses

By Doug Ross
Contributing editor

WILLOWS — In regular session April 9, the Board of Supervisors by consensus approved allocations of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds in the amounts of \$200,000 for the City of Orland and \$200,000 for the City of Willows.

These moneys had previously been set aside for both cities to be used towards recreation. The county had expressed an interest in helping both cities with their swimming pools, then asked each to identify matching funds for the county-administered

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Willows Kiwanis Club celebrate 100th year



WILLOWS — Above, Jim Lambert, Kiwanis MC for the evening; below, District Governor Carole Farris. Valley Mirror photos by Andrew Wilkins.



WILLOWS — The Willows Kiwanis Club celebrated its 100th Anniversary of serving the Willows community last Saturday, April 19, 2024, at

the Willows Elks Lodge, with a large group attending.

Grandsons of founders, members Jim Lambert and Don Byrd (Judge of the Superior Court) opened the meeting. President Ron Cooper led the flag salute, followed by singing of "My Country 'Tis of Thee," introductions of guests, recognitions and past reflections by members.

A Willows High School Kiwanis Key Club Officer Maya Chavez spoke about the club and its activities. Then the honored guest, the District Governor of California, Hawaii and Nevada, Carole Farris, spoke about her large district.

All enjoyed a delicious meal.

Willows council approves spending on goals workshop, education plan

By Doug Ross
Contributing editor

WILLOWS — Acknowledging that some past reports on priorities-setting have done little more than gather dust sitting on shelves, or the cyber equivalent, the Willows City Council, in regular session Apr. 9, decided to fund a new, more concise one.

Their vote was 5-0 to spend \$4,000 to have Chico-based

Ria Collaboratories facilitate a council Goal and Priority Setting Workshop. This was per Vice Mayor Evan Hutson's request for the council to consider.

A separate agenda item passed 4-1, which authorized \$10,000 for materials for City Manager Marti Brown to carry out an Educational Action Plan on the city's presently challenged fiscal situation.

Brown said she'd brought this concept forward prior to a lack of the required unanimous vote disqualifying the proposed 1.5 percent sales tax measure from appearing on the March ballot, which since has been qualified for November balloting.

Brown told the councilmembers the plan involves

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A plan to change utility rates is dividing California environmentalists

By Ben Christopher
CalMatters

On May 9, the California Public Utilities Commission is scheduled to vote on whether to let the state's largest power providers slap most customers with a new fixed charge.

Think of it like paying for a subscription service, except instead of forking over a monthly fee to watch old Friends episodes, this one lets you enjoy the comforts of 20th century living.

Also, according to the proposed rule, the utilities will be required to lower the rate we all pay for each unit of power we consume.

On average, electric bills won't go up or down, but most households aren't exactly av-

erage. Under the proposed change, people who use less electricity will pay a bit more as a result of the fee, while those who rack up large power bills will save thanks to the lower usage rates.

The basic idea isn't novel, even if it's wildly controversial here in California; Most utilities across the country already collect fixed charges. But this proposed regulation comes with a distinctly California twist: The fixed charges would vary by income, with higher earners paying a \$24 fee and lower-income households paying either \$6 or \$12.

The proposed charges are significantly less steep than ones proposed by the utilities themselves last spring,

which topped out at \$128 per month for the highest earners. But with a national average of roughly \$11 per month, the \$24 fee under consideration is still on the high end. Though most households will be compensated, at least partially, through lower rates, that sticker shock has engendered plenty of political outrage.

Republicans don't like it because the income-varying nature of the charge smacks of a progressive income tax. Many Democrats have lambasted the idea, too, because the lower volumetric rates will water down the incentive to mind one's electric usage. The utilities say they need some

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Adventures of a Rookie Councilman:

By David Vodden

Everyone who cares about Willows wants you to get into the game! There will be four seats available in the November election of the five seats that make up the Willows City Council.

Those four positions that need to be filled are mine, Gary Hanson, Evan Hutson, and Forrest Sprague. Evan Hutson was a surprise be-

cause we appointed him to fill the position left when Casey Hofenike moved away, who was elected for a four-year term.

You may recall that I replaced Kerry Warren and Forrest replaced Jeff Williams. Only Rick Thomas does not have to run this year. As a result, we could have a brand-new city council starting on January 1, 2025.

TCCA's Jeff Sutton named GCID general manager

By Doug Ross
Contributing editor

WILLOWS — Effective May 1, fifth-generation Colusa County native and attorney Jeff Sutton will take the reins as general manager of the Glenn-Colusa Irrigation District. Raised on a family farm that was established in 1870, Sutton will manage the largest agricultural irrigation district in the Sacramento Valley.

GCID oversees the operations and maintenance of a water conveyance system that serves 140,000 acres of irrigated farmland and over 20,000 acres of federal wild-

life refuge lands. GCID uses more than 2,000 miles of canals, laterals and drains. In his role, Sutton will direct the district in its mission to deliver irrigation water to more than 1,200 water users.

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Plan, from Page One

sources Control Board into the process, effectively starting over from scratch.

But even with the revised GSP, many of the specifics have yet to be determined.

For example, as part of the new plan, the groundwater authorities signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to develop a “demand management program” to prescribe how groundwater will be allocated. The program would be developed over multiple years, with a 2027 deadline.

A similar agreement was reached between the groundwater authorities to develop a plan for addressing impacts on domestic wells, with a 2026 deadline for implementation in that case.

In an executive summary, they wrote that the revised GSP represented “a clear and direct strategy for addressing overdraft, groundwater level decline, and subsidence in the Subbasin, and a plan for adapting and responding to any future changes to groundwater conditions in the Subbasin.”

AquAlliance, a Chico-based watchdog group focused on Northern California water issues, filed comments with the agencies that called the agreements between them “just big talk” in a subbasin where people and the environment are “in deep trouble.”

“Future plans, programs, monitoring, reporting, ‘preparing to implement,’ ‘evaluation of groundwater conditions,’ ‘overdraft concerns,’ mean nothing,” wrote AquAlliance, quoting from the revised GSP. The group noted that the agencies acknowledge that groundwater has been declining in the Orland-Artois and Arbuckle-College City areas over the past 15 to 20 years.

As part of its submission, AquAlliance presented a map showing areas of subsidence on agricultural land in Glenn and Colusa counties from Jan-

uary 2015 to October 2023, including locations in Artois and Arbuckle where land has fallen by an average of more than 4 inches a year.

Its related analysis of land use found the greatest levels of subsidence on agricultural land with deciduous trees, which includes walnut and almond orchards.

“Who do the GSAs, power brokers in the Subbasin, local government, and the State of California think they are fooling?!” the group wrote in its comments on the revised GSP.

The area covered by the Colusa Subbasin Groundwater Sustainability Plan is bounded by Stony Creek to the north, the Coast Ranges to the west, the Sacramento River to the east, and the Colusa-Yolo County boundary and the Colusa County Water District boundary to the south.

Under the new version of the plan, there are stricter limits on groundwater depletion and subsidence to better protect water resources and prevent state intervention.

- The new plan allows groundwater management actions to be taken if groundwater drops to a level of 75 feet below the surface in monitoring wells, rather than the prior 200 feet.

- The plan also limits subsidence to 1/10 of a foot per year, vs. a half-foot per year in the original plan, before management actions can be taken.

The City of Orland cast the sole vote against the prior plan before the original 2022 submission, saying it didn’t adequately protect domestic groundwater. The city supported the latest revision.

In a report to the Orland City Council prior to its April 2 meeting, Councilmember Bruce Roundy and City Manager Pete Carr said the new plan “responsibly approaches protection of the precious drinking water resources on which the people of Orland and Glenn County rely, as well as the integrity of the land which hosts our vital infrastructure.”

Rec uses, from Page One

ARPA dollars.

City of Orland’s Recreation Commission identified desired targeted spending on the pump track, \$12,000; Lely ball field lighting, \$168,000; infant swim lessons, \$20,000. City of Willows identified its desired use as one part of a multipart funding for repairs and restoration of the municipal pool in Sycamore Park.

The estimated total pool repair project cost is \$843,000, borne by Clean California Local Grant Program funds, \$466,000, Prop. 68 per capita grant funds, \$177,000; county ARPA funds, \$200,000. CAO Scott De Moss introduced the agenda item by noting that agenda packet materials show how each city proposed to leverage their respective \$20,000’s.

Supervisor Grant Carmon

Spending, from Page One

“methods to help disseminate information,” described in the run-up as involving “objectives, messages and activities regarding the city’s finances,” with some examples given of materials: design, printing, and direct mail.

Councilman David Vodden said in the discussion, “Clearly we have the ability to educate the public. This is our opportunity to have a positive outcome. Citizens want to know how it affects them and what’s in it for them.

“The word ‘structural deficit’ doesn’t click with the public. Our audience is our voters. There’s no crying wolf. How the sales tax revenues will be used. I’d use it to create infrastructure.”

Councilman Rick Thomas said, “Facebook is certainly someplace we could be, our own page. X (the former Twitter) seems popular, but I don’t know anyone in Willows on it. “We can talk about the Capital Improvement Program and the rest of it. A sustainable revenue message is what we need to send. Service organizations and anyone we can take court with.” He suggested one to two town hall meetings.

Vice Mayor Evan Hutson said fire, police, public works, recreation “are the big ones we can hit on. Sidewalk maintenance needs addressed. I semi-disagree with David Vodden. Let the people decide. Plus, improve our roads. That’s my two cents on it, but ‘yes.’” He encouraged “walking and talking to people.”

Mayor Gary Hansen said “Marti, this is a comprehensive list” of her delineation of the plan. He favored emphasizing local control and “at least one town hall meeting. Brown: “Would you like to walk precincts?” Hansen said he agrees with keeping the messages positive.

Hutson said he favors once the city council makes a decision, all should be on board. Councilman Forrest Sprague retorted, “I’ve got to go along to get along?” Hutson: “It’s a decision to be abided by, not a theory.” Sprague said, “That’s like having “five trained monkeys and give them a rubber stamp.” Vodden moved to approve, Hutson seconded.

Of the goal set workshop, Hutson said that Brown hit it squarely in saying, “There’s no road map for anyone to follow,” citing recreation as an example and “not just for the current council, but over three, five, 10 years” in a way that newcomers could understand, including looking at the city having its own recreation center and gym.

“Do we want to see parks updated every so often? We don’t really have that. Hit a problem before it becomes a problem.” Thomas said, “I

said “When we talked to the City of Orland they were more interested in using the funding to light their ball fields, which is desperately needed, but also wanted to allocate some for no-cost infants and children swim lessons.” He noted that with Orland having open water canals, “It seems every couple of years we lose a child.”

Supervisor Monica Rossman said she’s in full support, noting the program offering is called “Mommy and Me Classes” that “teach you how to teach your children.” Supervisor Tom Arnold: “I concur. This is all going to rec. It’s a great thing.”

Chairman Jim Yoder said original talk was about allocating for the pools then Orland expressed interest in uses for recreation in general. The projects identified by the cities are consistent with the U.S. Treasury guidelines for the use of the ARPA funds, De Moss noted.

agree. An action plan, not just another study.”

Vodden called the idea “a core values overlay: Does it fit our mission statement?” He asked how many policy road maps were developed and how many were followed, calling the number of those on the shelf “a joke.”

Sprague commended Hutson for the idea, reciting a list of past efforts such as the year 2000 Visioning Plan, 2003 Downtown Plan, Citizens for Economic Stability, and the SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis: “When SWOT was done, I asked the city manager to see it, and he said, “I’m sorry, they already took out the garbage.”

Thomas called for the workshop report to be short and succinct, two to four pages, “not real long.” Hutson said he wanted it to be “attention span friendly. Very basic. I want to stay away from poor night reads.”

Sutton, from Page One

“The GCID Board welcomes Jeff Sutton as its new general manager. I have known and worked with Jeff in various capacities over the past two decades and can personally attest to his passion and commitment to the protection of North State water rights and the preservation of agriculture,” GCID Board President John Amaro said. “I look forward to Jeff leading GCID in its efforts to manage, maintain and modernize the District to reliably, effectively and affordably serve its landowners, now and into the future.”

Sutton has served as general manager for the Tehama-Colusa Canal Authority for more than 17 years. At the Authority, he has been responsible for the management, op-



Where’s that cop lyric from?

This issue’s “song snippet” in the upper left “ear” on Page One is from “Fortnight” by Taylor Swift.

eration and maintenance of the Sacramento Canals Unit of the federal Central Valley Project, a 130-mile-long dual canal water irrigation system spanning four counties, serving 17 valley project water districts and 150,000 acres of farmland located on the west side of the Sacramento Valley.

The four counties are Tehama, Glenn, Colusa and Yolo. During his TCCA tenure, Sutton was instrumental in leading the effort to permit, design, and construct the Red Bluff Fish Passage Improvement Project.

The \$185 million project resulted in the construction of a new pumping plant and a quarter-mile-long fish screen that retired the operation of the Red Bluff Diversion Dam. This resulted in provision of reliable water diversions to the TCCA service area while simultaneously removing a significant fish passage impediment that greatly benefited several threatened and endangered fish species in the Upper Sacramento River.

Sutton has been closely involved in the development of the Sites Reservoir Project, serving as a director on the Sites Reservoir JPA Board for the last decade, and as its vice-chairman for the past five years. Prior to his tenure with the TCCA, Sutton worked to protect water and property rights as the executive director of the Maxwell-based Family Water Alliance. He also worked as an attorney in private practice with a focus on water law and business and real estate litigation.

Sutton said, “The district has played an important role in my family history, and I am honored to have the opportunity to contribute to its future as a regional leader in water resource stewardship and natural resource sustainability.

“The water delivered to our farms and ranches is the economic foundation of this region. I am personally invested in our local community and am committed to seeing it prosper and flourish.

I was born here, grew up here, and this is my home.

“I share a similar history, background, perspective and values as the landowners served by the district. My focus and efforts will be dedicated to the protection and preservation of the district legacy, its senior water rights, and the establishment of a more stable and certain regulatory environment, for the benefit of the growers today and future generations to come.”

Jessica Tapia’s

****Treasure Time****

Grand Opening

Saturday, April 27th

10:00-5:00

Cowhides

Kids’ Clothing (0-3 yrs)

Purses

Jewelry

Home Décor

Candles

Furniture

Event Planning

Event Rentals

& much more

Hope to see you there!

130 W. Sycamore Street

Willows, CA

Rates, from Page One

kind of fixed charge to help pay down wildfire and other rising fixed costs.

“Those who consume more electricity, such as a single family home with (a) pool, will receive a discount at the expense of a low electricity user, such as an apartment renter,” wrote Jacqui Irwin, an Assemblymember from Thousand Oaks, along with 21 of her fellow Democratic colleagues last fall.

Irwin is also the lead author of a bill that would put a tight lid on fixed charges, capping them at \$10 for most customers and \$5 for those enrolled in the state’s biggest energy assistance program.

What makes the debate especially unusual is where some of the state’s most influential environmental interests have come down on the proposal. Namely, on both sides. The Natural Resources Defense Council is for it. Environment California is against it. The Sierra Club called it a “mixed bag.”

Once upon a time, environmental interests shared a united view about the best way to make use of the grid: The less the better.

Now, depending on which green activist you ask, the regulatory proposal is either a state-backed break from the state’s long, eco-conscious tradition of encouraging energy conservation, or a necessary first step toward electrifying our homes and vehicles for the sake of the planet’s future.

“Ten years ago, even, the grid was mostly powered by fossil fuels,” said Mohit Ch-

habra, an analyst with the Natural Resources Defense Council, which backs the proposed change. “The question now, as the grid gets cleaner, is ‘When should you use more?’”

As the commission prepares for its vote early next month, the debate is the latest sign that the changing economics of electricity generation in California are beginning to upend the traditional politics of the grid as well.

The case for a fixed charge

The origin of the current debate dates back to at least 2021 when three UC Berkeley energy economists published a report on what’s wrong with California’s electricity prices.

The report is heavy on jargon, but the gist is simple: Rates are just way too high.

Severin Borenstein, one of the report’s authors, said that isn’t a populist argument; it’s an economic and environmental one. Providing energy through the state’s increasingly solar- and wind-saturated electric grid is not only cheaper, but vastly more environmentally friendly than getting an equivalent amount of energy by burning gasoline or methane.

But because California has some of the highest retail electric rates in the country, “the cost of fueling my Prius at a gas station is about the cost of fueling a Tesla — and it shouldn’t be,” he said. “We are sending entirely the wrong price signals and it’s undermining decarbonization.”

The reason for the gap between the price California households pay and the actual cost of producing the ener-

See Rates, Page 10