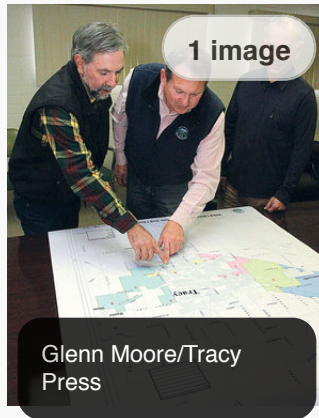


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Irrigation districts combine operations



West Side Irrigation District's board president, Jack Alvarez (from left), and Byron Bethany Irrigation District's general manager, Rick Gilmore, and board president, Russell Kagehiro, look over a map of the Tracy water districts. The two water districts are merging after nearly a year of meetings and hearings.



By Sam Matthews | Posted 11 hours ago

Although consolidation of two major Tracy area irrigation districts — West Side and Byron Bethany — isn't expected to be officially finalized until sometime next year, operations of the two districts have already been combined.

Since Dec. 1, the day-to-day functions of the two districts have been under the management of BBID, whose general manager, Rick Gilmore, is now interim manager of the combined operations.

We wanted to keep our farmers in business, so

consolidation is the answer.

“Staffs of both districts will remain the same,” Gilmore said. “We will work at making sure operations continue to serve our water customers as we seek to create efficiencies and eliminate any duplications.”

Dave Kaiser, who had been general manager of the West Side Irrigation District for 4½ years, retired Dec. 1, said Jack Alvarez, WSID board president.

He also reported that Ernest Pombo, a longtime director, has resigned from the West Side board, leaving Alvarez to be joined by continuing board members Tom Pereira, Randy Mattos and Steve Serpa in carrying out board-related business of WSID before the merger becomes official sometime next year.

Carol Petz, WSID secretary-treasurer, is continuing to staff the office at 1320 N. Tracy Blvd. and will be a day-to-day contact with water customers, as will Rich Martinez, West Side general foreman.

Gilmore, Alvarez and BBID board president Russell Kagehiro met at the West Side office earlier this week to outline elements of combining operations of the two districts.

Noting that West Side Irrigation District marked the 100th anniversary of its founding last year, Alvarez said the combining of operations leading to a complete merger of the two districts was a landmark and necessary move, ratified by the board in the summer.

“As more and more of our district is lost to urbanization of the Tracy area, West Side could no longer survive with fewer customers and mounting operational costs,” he said. “We wanted to keep our farmers in business, so consolidation is the answer.”

Before the merger can be officially completed, however, the San Joaquin Local Agency Formation Commission must conduct an extensive study of what combining the two districts will mean for water access and deliveries and other community aspects. LAFCo will also conduct a series of public hearings on the consolidation. The process could take as long as another year.

When consolidation is finally completed, Alvarez and Pereira will join an expanded BBID board.

Combining the operations of the two districts will create a 36,000-acre water system — 30,000 acres now in BBID and 6,000 acres in WSID — stretching from east of Tracy to near Brentwood.

Water, pumped from the Delta and also acquired from the Delta-Mendota Canal, goes to both agricultural and municipal and industrial (M&I) users.

Byron Bethany provides up to 10,000 acre-feet of water to Mountain House and wholesales up to 4,6000 acre-feet of “paper transfer” water from the canal to the city of Tracy for distribution to Tracy Hills, which is now beginning construction of infrastructure.

BBID also provides water, distributed by the city of Tracy, to the Patterson Pass Business Park that includes Safeway, Costco and Musco Olive and the Adesa Golden Gate auto auction. Supplemental water is available to the 1,200-acre Prologis International Park of Commerce, where Medline and [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)'s second Tracy fulfillment center are already in operation. An

additional 600 acres of the original Cordes Ranch property west of Tracy also falls within BBID.

West Side Irrigation District, which traditionally concentrated on agricultural irrigation deliveries, has contracted with the city of Tracy to provide drainage services through WSID ditches.

In noting the varied and often complicated ways the districts secure and deliver water, Kagehiro, the BBID board president, said that the challenges and increasing demands of dealing with regulatory and political issues involving water were driving consolidation of irrigation and water districts throughout California.

“There are different sources of water in the region — district, state and federal — and we all pull from them, so you have to have a system available to have sufficient land and infrastructure,” he said. “It’s like a small business; you’ve got to grow.”

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