RECLAMATION
Managing Water in the West

Mid-Pacific Region
San Luis Unit Drainage, Central Valley Project

Background

The San Luis Unit is part of both the federal Central Valley Project (CVP) and the California State Water Project. Authorized by the San Luis Act in June 1960 (Public Law 86-488), it is jointly operated by the Bureau of Reclamation and the California Department of Water Resources (DWR). The principal purpose of the San Luis Unit is irrigation water supply for almost 1 million acres of prime farmland in central California.

The principal purpose of the San Luis Unit is providing irrigation water.

The San Luis Unit is located in California's San Joaquin Valley, which has some of the world's most productive agricultural lands. Much of the west side of the valley has highly fertile soils that benefit from imported irrigation water; however, clay layers beneath the agricultural lands prevent excess irrigation water from draining deeper into the soil and away from crop roots, negatively impacting agricultural productivity.

Features of the San Luis Unit

The San Luis Unit's joint-use facilities include O'Neill Dam and Forebay, B.F. Sisk San Luis Dam, San Luis Reservoir and the San Luis Canal. The federal-only features include the O'Neill Pumping Plant and Intake Canal, Coalinga Canal and the San Luis Drain. Construction of the drain began in 1968 to collect and transport subsurface drainage water from the San Luis Unit to the Sacramento-San Joaquin Bay-Delta. Of the planned 188 miles of drain, only 87 miles were completed. Construction was halted in 1975 because of mounting costs and concerns about the potential water quality effects in the Delta. Agricultural drain water from a 42,000-acre portion of Westlands Water District (WWD) was conveyed in the San Luis Drain between 1977 and 1985.

Kesterson Reservoir

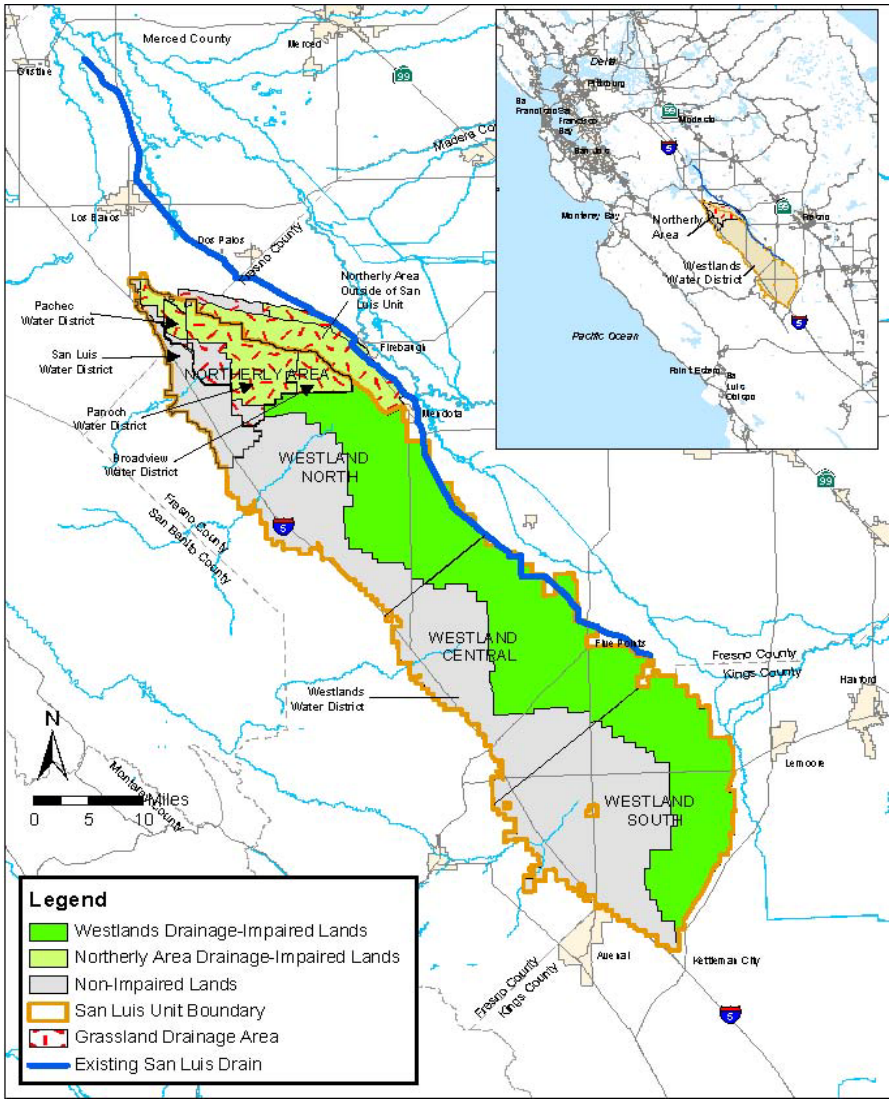
The San Luis Drain ended near Gustine, Calif., at Kesterson Reservoir, within the federal Kesterson National Wildlife Refuge and the state's San Luis Wildlife Management Area. The drain water was allowed to pond and evaporate, pending approval of an outlet for the drain in the Delta, but the drain water contained high levels of salts and trace minerals. In 1982, hundreds of dying waterfowl and deformed/stillborn embryos were discovered at Kesterson, attributed to high concentrations of selenium in the drain water. In 1985, Reclamation halted collection of drain water from WWD, closed the San Luis Drain, ended drain water flows to Kesterson and began to clean up the contaminated ponds in 1986. More than a million cubic yards of clean dirt were used to bury the contaminated sediments in 1989. Reclamation has conducted a comprehensive environmental monitoring program at Kesterson.

Court Rulings

In 1995 the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of California, in litigation brought by landowners in WWD (*Sumner Peck Ranch v. Reclamation*), concluded that the 1960 San Luis Act imposed a mandatory duty on the Secretary of the Interior to provide drainage service to the San Luis Unit. In 2000, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit upheld the District Court ruling but held that the Department of the Interior (DOI) has discretion to meet the drainage obligation with a plan other than constructing the drain to the Delta as originally envisioned in the 1954 Feasibility Report for the San Luis Act. In 2001, Reclamation submitted a Plan of Action to the Court outlining a schedule to complete a reevaluation of the drainage service.

Environmental Documents
Reclamation completed a Final Environmental Impact Statement in May 2006 and signed the Record of Decision (ROD) for the *San Luis Drainage Feature Re-evaluation EIS* in March 2007, selecting the "In-Valley/Water Needs/Land Retirement Alternative."

Reclamation transmitted a new Feasibility Report to Congress in July 2008, presenting the relative economic analysis of the drainage plan and confirming the need for new authorizing legislation to increase the appropriations ceiling for funding beyond what was authorized by the 1960 San Luis Act. The estimated cost to fully implement the ROD was $2.7 billion. Selecting the "In-Valley/ Water Needs/Land Retirement Alternative" would fulfill the requirements of the Court order that Reclamation has a statutory duty to provide drainage service to the San Luis Unit.



Map showing the drainage-impaired lands in California's San Joaquin Valley.

Drainage Status Today
In November 2009, as part of on-going litigation, the Department of Justice (DOJ), on behalf of DOI, advised the court that while DOI could not implement the entire San Luis Unit Drainage ROD, a sufficient appropriation ceiling remained to allow DOI to construct one sub-unit of drainage facilities within WWD. A Supplemental Status Report filed in November 2011 concluded that a proposed phased approach to the provision of drainage service in the central sub-unit of WWD is feasible and, accordingly, supports WWD's request to proceed with Phase 1 implementation of the construction under the 2007 ROD in a portion of the central sub-unit as described in the Revised Control Schedule.

Reclamation has initiated the process for securing a repayment contract with WWD for the recovery of costs associated with the construction of a distribution system and drainage facilities in the central sub-unit. In early fall 2012, Reclamation proposes to award a contract for the construction, operation and maintenance of a demonstration treatment plant for treatment of drainage water within the Panoche Water District's geographical boundaries of the existing San Joaquin River Improvement Project reuse area.

Reclamation's goal is a balanced approach that promotes continued sustainable agricultural productivity. The approach would lead to improved environmental quality and increased reliability of the water supply for the Central Valley by providing for locally controlled, timely and effective irrigation drainage management in the San Luis Unit and certain adjacent areas.

For More Information:
MP Region Public Affairs
916-978-5100
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