

# OID Predicts Future Ag Land Use In Area

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As part of the overall scope of the Water Resource Plan, designers CH2M Hill came to Oakdale Irrigation District directors Tuesday, May 17, with an overview of projected land use within and surrounding the district.

The purpose of the presentation was to offer projected identified trends within and outside the district that may affect future revenue and to discern how the district may evolve from these changes.

A number of representatives from CH2M Hill were present throughout the presentation to offer explanations of their compiled data, which included observations and conclusions for the district.

Using a time period of eight years as a gauge (1996-2004), it was determined there has been a significant decrease in native vegetation to make way for tree acreage and pasture ground.

"Anything that was native has been converted to irrigated land," the presenter said. "And what hasn't been converted is generally land unsuitable for irrigation, such as riparian land."

Case in point, tree acreage has increased by 30 percent within the district and 130 percent outside of the district, he said.

According to data compiled,

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the shift is being attributed to an all-time high market price for almonds and other deciduous tree crops.

Another area of interest to the district is the current and projected urban growth. As the need for irrigated land changes, the district may have to make adjustments to accommodate a shrinking customer base.

Currently, the City of Oakdale is reporting an annual growth rate of 2.6 percent, which represents steady growth. The urban areas with the most growth are contiguous to the city and to areas already urbanized. In comparison, the City of Riverbank is reporting an annual growth rate of 5.3 percent, which is not only considered rapid but proving erratic. During the study period, the population of Riverbank has exceeded that of Oakdale by nearly 1,500 people.

"I'm concerned about the boundaries between Riverbank and Oakdale," said director Jack Alpers referencing the 'green belt' separating the two

cities. "Riverbank only has one way to grow and that's east."

Director Tony Taro agreed, adding the driving force behind the rapid growth seems to be a favorable relationship between current interest rates and available financing.

On the books, there is an agreement to observe the sphere of influence and maintain the green belt, but circumstances can change as identified by recent trends.

"We can't tell you what's going to go onto that land in five years but we can study the trends and have a pretty good idea," offered a presenter.

In conclusion, it was projected that within 10 years OID will lose pasture land to trees and the urban areas will continue to grow. When that happens, OID stands to lose some of its customer base but since only 10 percent of the district's revenue is derived from such transactions, the loss will not overly affect OID financially. Although knowing what the future may hold is essential for planning purposes, said General Manager Steve Knell.

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