



Westlands Water District

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Westlands Water District General Manager, Thomas W. Birmingham, Announces Retirement

Fresno, November 23, 2022 – Today, Thomas W. Birmingham announced his plans to retire from Westlands Water District on December 31, 2022. The District is grateful for Mr. Birmingham’s unwavering dedication to the District and his many years of loyal service and extends him best wishes for a happy retirement.

Mr. Birmingham has worked on behalf of the District for more than 36 years- from 1986 through 2000 as outside counsel and since 2000 as its General Manager. He is a recognized expert on issues of water and environmental law and has guided the District through complex water policy changes and some of the driest hydrology on record. While in private law practice, he represented both public agencies and private parties in matters related to water rights, water quality, drainage issues, the Endangered Species Act, the California Environmental Quality Act, the Clean Water Act and other environmental laws.

In response to Mr. Birmingham’s announcement Director Daniel Errotabere, who served as the President of Westlands from 2002-2005 and again from 2020-2021, said: “When I joined the Westlands Board in 1993, I was immediately impressed with Tom’s intelligence, work ethic, and loyalty to the District. When the position of General Manager became vacant in 2000, he was the natural choice to become General Manager. Many people assumed that Tom would continue to approach issues from the perspective of a litigator, but it quickly became apparent that as General Manager his approach would be collaborative, not combative. Tom became a resource not only for Westlands, but for other public water agencies. Many of those agencies have looked to Tom to lead efforts to enhance water supplies and operational flexibility for the Central Valley Project. People in Washington and Sacramento also have looked to Tom as a resource and problem solver. I think Senator Dianne Feinstein summed it up best in 2016 when she said, ‘Tom Birmingham certainly knows a lot about California water policy... [W]hile I know his top priority now is representing Westlands, I do appreciate the breadth of knowledge

he brings to the table. Tom and I don't always see eye to eye, but I've known him for 15 years, and I do appreciate the experience and concern he brings to the debate.”

Director Errotabere concluded his comment by stating, “At the Board’s direction, one of Tom’s priorities over the last several years has been the Voluntary Agreements. People up and down the State, including Governor Gavin Newsom, have looked to Tom to help advance the program. I pray Tom’s retirement will not impede getting the Voluntary Agreements done, because they are our best hope to change the way State and federal agencies work to protect fish and to deliver water to people and farms.”

Frank Coelho, Jr., who has been on Westlands’ Board since 1991 and is its longest serving Director, said in response to Mr. Birmingham’s announcement: “Tom is one of the best water lawyers in the State of California. No one has a more detailed knowledge about the history of the Central Valley Project and of Westlands. His work on behalf of Westlands, both as an attorney and as General Manager, has been exemplary. His actions were always consistent with policy direction given by the Board. The reality is Westlands is always going to be reliant on surface water supplies moved through the Delta, and no one is more capable than Tom when it comes to enhancing and protecting those supplies.”

The District anticipates that, in December, the Board of Directors will consider appointing an Interim General Manager to serve after Mr. Birmingham’s retirement and will discuss a process to select his replacement.

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About Westlands Water District

Westlands Water District is recognized as a world leader in agricultural water conservation and has served the farmers and rural communities on the west side of Fresno and Kings counties for more than five decades. As stewards of one of California’s most precious natural resources, Westlands continually invests in conservation and champions farmers deploying innovative irrigation methods based on the best available technology.