

RECLAMATION DISTRICTS

Reclamation Districts are the oldest special districts in Sacramento County. Most reclamation districts were formed prior to 1900, and some are over one hundred years old. The reclaiming of land in Sacramento County was given impetus in 1864, when the California State law limiting ownership of reclamation lands to 640 was repealed, thus making the reclamation of the Delta feasible since it could be done on a large scale. Large land investors financed reclamation of potentially rich Delta farmland in hopes of high returns from agricultural production. During the next thirty years, extensive reclamation of the entire Delta area took place and the area became one of the most agriculturally productive regions in the State.

Federal, state, and local governments all play a part in the functioning of Reclamation Districts. Private landowners or the Districts initially constructed levee projects. The Federal Corps of Engineers does reconstruction work on levees to make them higher as well as bring them up to uniform standards. The work of the Corps is undertaken pursuant to an Act of Congress of 1917 (as amended at various times), and the Sacramento River Bank Protection Project (which is the current Federal project dealing with project levees in Sacramento County). The State has authorized the securing of necessary lands and rights-of-way for these projects at State cost. Pumping plants, drainage ditches, and all interior works required for both construction and maintenance within the district are the responsibility of the district.

The State Reclamation Board monitors Reclamation Districts to ensure they are properly maintaining their facilities. If the State Reclamation Board determines that the local agency is not adequately maintaining its levee system, it has the power to establish a maintenance area that will maintain the levee. The maintenance area is operated by the State Water Resources Department. Once the State invokes this power, it assumes the responsibility of the levee. The State Reclamation Board has police powers with regard to encroachment of levees and the issuance of permits for levee use and construction. Additionally, the Board has the power of approval of new districts' plans for improvement. The County has no authority regarding Reclamation Districts other than to collect the taxes for the District.

It is very difficult to accurately list the Reclamation Districts in the County because there is no requirement to inform the State Lands Commission when they become inactive or dissolve, but they are required to register with the Lands Commission when they form. As a result of this, there are eighty-four Reclamation Districts shown on the records located in Sacramento County but only twenty-one are believed to be currently active . Most of the Reclamation Districts were formed by a single, comprehensive Reclamation District Act in the Water Code Section 50000. Three have been created by special acts of the legislature. Reclamation Districts are authorized to reclaim land by the construction of levees, provide irrigation water, provide proper drainage facilities, and provide for the operation and maintenance of facilities and levees. The districts are independent; they

have elected boards of directors, comprised of three, five, or seven members, who serve four-year staggered terms or two-year non-staggered terms. Reclamation Districts are required by law to be assessed and taxed by the County in which the largest portion of the district lies. The amount of the assessment varies, depending on the budgetary needs of the district. Assessments may be called at any time at the discretion of the board of directors. If the need arises for capital outlay, or any other rise in costs, the districts may issue general obligation bonds by majority vote of the landowners, at one vote per one dollar assessed valuation. The proportional assessment of the landowner provides the money for the day-to-day operation of the District.