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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Westlands Water District To Provide Habitat for Delta Smelt

(Fresno, CA – December 13, 2007) California farmers are coming to the aid of a tiny endangered fish, the Delta Smelt. The Westlands Water District announced today that it acquired property in the northern Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. The District plans to restore natural tidal wetlands and upland habitat for the protection and conservation of listed species, including the smelt.

“We’re trying to solve a problem that is of critical importance, not just for agriculture but also for 25 million Californians who get drinking water and water for irrigation from supplies conveyed through and pumped from the Delta,” said Tom Birmingham, General Manager of Westlands.

As the smelt’s numbers have declined, a federal court in California has ordered new restrictions on Central Valley Project and State Water Project operations that will result in massive water supply reductions, amounting to a loss of one-third of the water that is normally delivered from the Delta. Those deliveries are needed to supply billions of dollars worth of agricultural production in the Central Valley and meet the water needs of two-thirds of the state’s residents.

These restrictions are in addition to prior restrictions prescribed for the protection of the smelt and come on top of two years of an ongoing drought. As a result, many experts are predicting major losses for the state’s economy and water shortages in the Bay Area, Los Angeles, Orange County, and San Diego.

“Saving the smelt is an issue of self-preservation for most of California,” Birmingham said. “Regulation of the state’s water supply projects alone hasn’t worked, and as a public agency with responsibility for providing water for more than 500,000 acres of farmland, the District’s Board of Directors decided we need to act directly to help solve a critical problem.”

“We recognize that water is a sensitive issue, in Yolo County as in the rest of the state,” Birmingham said. “We plan to be a good neighbor in Yolo.”

The Delta property that Westlands acquired is in the area identified by state and federal fisheries experts as the prime location to create habitat for the smelt. Lying at the southernmost tip of Yolo County, the property is currently used for farming. Westlands

plans to convert portions of the property to create habitat for the smelt and maintain the rest in agriculture.

“The plight of the smelt is just one part of the problems facing the Delta,” Birmingham pointed out. “We’re working with other public water agencies, state and federal authorities, and the scientific community to define ways to restore the Delta, increase the reliability and adequacy of water deliveries, and ensure the safety of the public water supply. It is a complicated process, but everyone agrees that protecting the smelt is an essential element of any comprehensive plan for restoring the Delta and providing improved conveyance.”

About Westlands:

The Westlands Water District serves a community of more than 600 families who farm some of the most productive agricultural lands in the world. Westlands is constantly changing to meet the needs of a dynamic marketplace, enhance the environment, expand the diversity of its crops and apply the most advanced irrigation techniques and technology for water conservation and long-term sustainable production.

Westlands is the largest agricultural water district in the United States. It encompasses more than 600,000 acres in an area 15 miles wide and 70 miles long on the west side of California’s Central Valley. To address chronic water supply shortages resulting from environmental regulations in the Delta Westlands has, at its own expense, fallowed nearly 100,000 acres.

The value of the food and fiber produced by Westlands farmers currently totals \$1 billion dollars a year and the regional economic activity generated by its operations exceeds \$3.5 billion annually. Diversity is the key to the district’s continuing prosperity. Twenty five years ago, for example, 79 percent of the district’s lands were planted in cotton, wheat and other field crops. Today more than 61 percent of the district’s lands are producing fruits and vegetables as well as permanent crops such as almonds, pistachios and grapes.

Westlands is a world leader in water conservation. Scientific research and innovation keep Westlands at the cutting edge of new technology. From its inception, Westlands’ distribution system has been fully enclosed, to eliminate losses from evaporation and leakage. Laser-levelling, computer-aided drip irrigation and the extensive use of global positioning systems help Westlands farmers achieve efficiencies of water use of 85 percent or more.