Ceres Main Canal TCC Pilot Project FAQ

Frequently Asked Questions regarding Ceres Main Canal TCC Pilot Project and the Rubicon software/hardware that will be utilized

Created October 2025

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Ceres Main Canal TCC Pilot Project – Description

The Ceres Main Canal TCC Pilot Project is a multi-year initiative running through the end of the 2027 irrigation season, with go-live scheduled for March 2026 at the start of the 2026 irrigation season. The project will implement Rubicon in-channel, side gate and scheduling automation on the Ceres Main Canal to modernize TID's irrigation operations. The system will automatically adjust drop gates to regulate flows and reduce spills, while also helping schedule orders and operating side gates according to the finalized schedule. Unlike TID's existing automation on Lateral 8, this project introduces a higher level of automation, where Rubicon will generate initial schedules, notify customers of order details, and operate gates automatically. Water Distribution Operators (WDOs) will retain oversight, refining and finalizing schedules as needed. This pilot represents a significant step toward greater efficiency, accuracy, and customer service in TID's irrigation system.

Ceres Main Canal TCC Pilot Project – Mission Statement

The Ceres Main Canal TCC Pilot Project supports the initiatives of the TID Comprehensive Water Plan by building on existing automation and evaluating the feasibility of automating irrigation deliveries, while achieving water savings and enhancing current service levels. Results will inform future TID decisions regarding the broader implementation of canal automation.

Frequently Asked Questions about the Ceres Main Canal TCC Pilot Project

How does the TCC Pilot Project relate to the Comprehensive Water Plan?

While the TCC Pilot Project contributes to the goals of the Comprehensive Water Plan, it is just one part of a broader strategy. The Comprehensive Water Plan is a forward-looking roadmap for the District, encompassing multiple focus areas, which can be summarized into three key categories: Non-Capital Efforts, Water Supply Augmentation, and Irrigation System Modernization. The TCC Pilot Project falls within the third category, Irrigation System Modernization. The District is committed to moving to a zero-spill system by 2045. The TCC Pilot Project is critical to informing that path by providing data that allows the District to determine next steps in that 20-year plan. In short, the TCC Pilot Project advances the initiatives of the Comprehensive Water Plan, but it is not synonymous with the Plan itself.

Has any other irrigation district in the U.S. fully implemented Rubicon TCC like TID is doing?

Many irrigation districts in the U.S., including TID, already use Rubicon hardware and software successfully. However, TID will be the first to implement the complete TCC system, which includes automation of water ordering, scheduling, and delivery. Because each district has unique needs and due to the costs involved, other irrigation districts have used only portions of the Rubicon TCC system rather than the full offering. However, with the increasing value of water and risks from climate change, it is likely that the number of these systems will increase over time. The District is aware of at least one other irrigation district planning to implement the same system in the near future.

How will TID prepare growers in the TCC Pilot Project area for the transition to Rubicon automation?

TID is committed to ensuring that growers in the TCC Pilot Project area have plenty of opportunities to learn about the upcoming changes with Rubicon automation—including how to use the system to order and receive water. While the external communication plan is still being finalized, grower outreach is expected to begin in November 2025, following the close of the 2025 Irrigation Season.

How is TID making sure the TCC Pilot Project and Rubicon automation meet the needs of local growers?

Since the launch of the TCC Pilot Project, TID has leveraged our subject matter experts in water engineering and water operations, including our Water Distribution Operators (WDOs), to build a complete picture of how water is currently managed by the District and how growers manage their irrigations. With this knowledge, TID has collaborated with Rubicon Water to customize its software to meet the unique needs of TID growers. Valuable input has come not only from TID staff, many of whom are growers themselves, but also from conversations with a selected group of growers in the pilot area. TID will continue to collect information and feedback from staff and customers as the project moves forward.

How does in-channel automation help reduce water spills while still meeting growers' irrigation needs?

TID's irrigation system has been delivering water to growers for more than 125 years. It's a gravity-fed system that is managed by hand, with operators opening and closing gates along the canals. Because of the size and complexity of the system, water has to be released from Turlock Lake in steady flows, and once water passes a gate, there's no way to move it back upstream.

This makes it difficult to precisely match water deliveries to changing grower needs. To make sure everyone has enough, the canals are often run with more water than is actually needed. When the extra water isn't used, it spills out of the canal. To reduce this waste, operators sometimes pump groundwater to handle local demand instead of ordering more water from the lake—but this is costly, and the well water is usually lower quality than lake water.

Canal automation solves many of these problems. Automated drops and gates can respond quickly to changes in demand, helping prevent extra water from being released. TID first tested this automated drop technology on Lateral 8 in 2015, and growers there saw big improvements: more reliable water deliveries, reduced groundwater pumping, and almost no unintended spill.

Currently, TID spills about 48,400 acre-feet of water each year (roughly equal to 4 inches of water across the District). The pilot project will test how much of that water can be saved by expanding canal automation.

How will TID ensure growers are ready to receive water before a side gate automatically opens?

Irrigators will have the option to be notified via text message and/or email of the official start time one hour before their side gate is scheduled to open. Before the gate can open, the system requires confirmation from the grower, submitted through the Rubicon online portal, that they are ready to receive water. If confirmation is not received within 30 minutes of the scheduled start, the irrigation order is placed on hold and a TID operator is alerted. The operator may then contact the grower directly to verify readiness and manually confirm the order in the system. In all cases, confirmation is required before the Rubicon system will open the gate.

How will TID support growers who aren't currently using the TID Online Water Request system?

The TCC Pilot Project covers 287 parcels, and right now 241 of them (about 84%) are already using the TID Online Water Request system. Our project team will be reaching out to the growers in this area to make sure they have the tools and support they need to successfully take part in the project.

Can growers choose not to participate in the TCC Pilot Project?

Parcels that irrigate off the Ceres Main Canal between Drops 21 and 32 are part of the TCC Pilot Project area. Hardware will be installed throughout the area, and operators will use new automated scheduling

software to help manage all water orders from that service area. All parcels within the pilot area must participate by ordering and receiving irrigation water through the new TCC Pilot Project processes.

How does the Rubicon system notify growers about their irrigation orders, and can multiple irrigators receive notifications for the same parcel?

The Rubicon system uses grower cell phone numbers and e-mail addresses to send notifications about irrigation windows, start and end times of irrigation orders, and to request confirmation of readiness to receive water prior to delivery. Growers provide their cell phone information when registering for a Rubicon account. Once the account is set up, parcels are added so irrigation orders can be placed. The system allows multiple registered irrigators for each parcel, and all users receive all text and e-mail notifications. This ensures that everyone associated with a parcel has the information they need to successfully manage their irrigations.

How will growers in the TCC Pilot Project area access the Rubicon ordering system, and how will TID ensure that only eligible parcels use it?

Parcels in the TCC Pilot Project will place their irrigation orders exclusively through the Rubicon online system. Growers will access the Rubicon system in the same location where they currently use the TID Online Water Request system. TID will make sure the access point is clear, easy to use, and only prompts parcels included in the TCC Pilot Project to use the Rubicon system. The Rubicon system will not allow users to register parcels that are not included in the TCC Pilot Project area.

Will growers still be able to use the TID Online Water Request (OWR) system for payments and other non-ordering features?

Growers can continue to use the TID Online Water Request (OWR) system for information on all TID parcels. While water ordering for parcels in the TCC Pilot Project will move to the new system, all other features of OWR will remain available for every TID parcel, including those within the pilot area.

Will customers in the TCC Pilot Project area still have access to their WDO's?

Growers in the TCC Pilot Project area (Service Area 7) will continue to have direct access to their WDO whenever they need support. While the Rubicon system will handle start time notifications and confirmations, adjustments, and end-time notifications, WDOs will remain a trusted resource—ready and available to help, answer questions, and provide guidance just as they always have.

What comes next after the TCC Pilot Project is complete?

Information gathered from the TCC Pilot Project will be used to inform future TID decisions regarding the broader implementation of canal automation. Any decisions about expanding automation across the canal system will be made once the pilot results have been thoroughly evaluated.