

THE Current



MID's Monthly Newsletter

November 2015



WATER & POWER

MID Main Office

744 W. 20th Street.
Merced, CA. 95340
(209)722-5761

Customer Service

Water: (209)722-2720
Electric: (209)722-3041

Board Meetings

Merced Civic Center
678 W. 18th Street
Merced, CA 95340

The first Tuesday of every
month at 10:00 am.

Mailing Address

PO Box 2288
Merced, CA 95344

Websites

www.mercedid.org
www.lakemcclure.com



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Season ends, drought continues



*Lake
McClure
was at less
than
8 percent of
its capacity
in late
October
2015 as the
drought
persisted.*

After four consecutive years of drought, for the first time in its history, MID had no irrigation season this year.

Earlier in the spring, with record-low storage and inflow to Lake McClure, the District's Board of Directors decided to keep the extremely limited amount of available water in storage behind the dam. Among the concerns was that Lake McClure would fall well below 11.5 percent of its capacity – the point at which MID can no longer divert surface water for irrigation. This in turn would make it more difficult to refill the reservoir

to a level that could support irrigation allocations. The reservoir was only above its "minimum pool" by about 15,000 acre feet at the time the board made the decision.

Without the surface water from Lake McClure available, a small amount of water – approximately 14,000 acre feet – was supplied to growers through MID's conjunctive groundwater pumping program, the Supplemental Water Supply Pool Program. MID typically recharges up to 140,000 acre feet of groundwater each year by diverting Lake

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FROM THE HEADGATE: MID GENERAL MANAGER JOHN SWEIGARD

Merced Irrigation District has a proud history dating back to the early 1900s. To this day, we still exercise the water rights and use many of the original canals and structures that were built as a result of our forefathers' wisdom and foresight. The question remains: will outside interests diminish the value of our efforts? MID continues to face unprecedented challenges well beyond the current drought. Among them

are protecting our water rights from outside interests, maintaining our water delivery system, ensuring a sustainable groundwater basin and protecting the District's financial well-being.

SUSTAINABLE GROUNDWATER

For decades, MID has managed its water for conjunctive use: this means the District

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replenishes up to 140,000 acre feet of groundwater each year with water flowing from Lake McClure through the District's unlined canals and recharge basins. MID then pumps a small portion of that water out as needed in dry years.

Last year the California legislature passed the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act. The legislation requires local agencies to develop sustainable groundwater basins. The SGMA legislation requires that those pumping groundwater must have a local agency by 2017 and a plan to ensure sustainability by 2020.

MID has a long history of working collaborating with other local government agencies in Merced County toward protecting and improving the local groundwater basin. This includes monitoring the basin and conducting studies to enhance the conjunctive use. The work has also examined the available drinking water in the aquifer and developed further understanding of the various activities which can affect the basin.

MID has taken a leadership role in reaching groundwater sustainability required by the state law. The District has taken concrete steps toward

complying with the new law, hiring a facilitator funded by a grant from the state Department of Water Resources.

WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT PLAN

More than a year ago, MID began work on a long-term Water Resources Management Plan. The plan is intended to help guide Board and staff decision making – and protect MID resources – for decades to come. Much of the technical studies supporting the plan have now been completed. These findings will soon be presented to the MID Board of Directors. The technical analysis and field work are thorough and detailed. Among other things, they have identified farming practices, future land-use projections and potential improvements to be made within the MID water delivery system. The complete list of goals identified for the plan is as follows:

- Protect and maximize MID's water rights
- Ensure continued strong financial health of MID
- Provide a reliable and affordable water supply to MID customers
- Continued focus on MID customer service
- Promote sustainable management of groundwater resources
- Support the agricultural economic base of the region

The effort has also resulted in the development of computer models which can help predict District water needs. The

models allow for examination of the impacts and effects of various resource management decisions on local groundwater, its use by multiple parties, and its replenishment by MID surface water from Lake McClure. Further, the plan includes a computer model related to MID's future finances. This information, along with the modeling tools, are intended to help MID leaders establish the best practices and have the best information possible when making decisions related to the District's future.

A public workshop will be held with a presentation on the development of the MID Water Resources Management Plan, as well as the various information and the modeling tools. The workshop will be held at 10 a.m. on Nov. 17 at the Merced Civic Center, 678 W. 18th St. in Merced.

WATER RIGHTS AND STORAGE

Both to the State Water Resources Control Board and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission are continuing their proposals diverting more water from Lake McClure to the Bay Delta. We expect final versions of both plans in the coming months. Both the state water board and federal energy commission have received overwhelming opposition from our local community.

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McClure water through its open canals and recharge basins.

With conditions becoming dire on local farms, by mid-July the MID Board decided to release the minimal amount of water MID had stored in Lake McClure to in-District growers. This provided a short irrigation run and delivered about 7,500 acre feet to growers during a three-week period. To put that in perspective, that's just 2.5 percent of the 300,000 acre feet MID would deliver in a more typical irrigation season.



Bagby Bridge, at the upper end of the reservoir is seen in spring of 2011, left, and in fall of 2014, right.

"This has unquestionably been the most challenging and difficult year since the drought began: it marks the first year MID has not had an irrigation season with surface water from Lake McClure," said Bryan Kelly, Deputy General Manager of MID Water Resources. "Were it not for everyone pulling together – from growers to

customer service to our irrigation system operators – it would have been even worse."

MID's Kelly noted that the District's water conveyance system was built to distribute large volumes of surface water to growers, not small amounts of conjunctive groundwater. MID crews, he said, worked tirelessly to reconfigure the conveyance

system to meet this year's requirements by installing cofferdams, temporary pipes and taking other measures. MID also allowed numerous temporary facilities to be installed by growers to help facilitate their operations.

As of early October, Lake McClure had fallen to less than 87,000 acre feet of water, or just 8 percent.

The El Nino weather pattern is expectedly grabbing national and statewide headlines. However, it is entirely too soon for MID to

make any predictions about the snowfall or inflow to Lake McClure.

For the latest information, please visit our "drought watch" page found at mercedid.org, or you can also like us on facebook. As always, don't hesitate to stop by the office or give us a call at 722-5761.