



# Restoration of salmon habitat continues on the Merced River

For Immediate Release: March 26, 2021

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Efforts are continuing to support restoration of crucial habitat for salmon spawning and rearing on the Merced River.

Last fall, Merced Irrigation District completed the Merced River Instream and Off Channel Habitat Restoration Project. Adult salmon, which migrated from the ocean to the river, are already known to have used the new gravel beds for spawning. Now, in the coming months, surveys will be done by biologists to further study the use of the new stretch of river and the developing juvenile salmon that may rear there.

“MID is proud of the work we’re doing, and that’s especially true of our efforts to protect and support migrating salmon on the Merced River. Although the damage to the river was not the result of our operations, we believe it is the right thing to do,” said MID General Manager John Sweigard.

Between the early and mid-1900s, state-sanctioned mining allowed large dredging machines to be placed in the middle of the Merced River between Snelling and Crocker Huffman Diversion Dam. The dredging resulted in salmon spawning and rearing habitat being pulled up from the river and spread for miles on either side of the river.

What now remains are sections of river capable of conveying water downstream, but lacking natural floodplain and habitat needed by salmon and other natural flora and fauna.

The Instream and Off Channel Habitat Restoration Project completed last fall consisted of re-grading and enhancing more than 7-acres of riparian and upland habitat along the Merced River. It also involved the enhancement of approximately 1.7-acres of salmonid spawning habitat; 3.9-acres of seasonally inundated juvenile rearing habitat; and approximately 13-acres of the Merced River channel.

The Project is located approximately 1,400 feet downstream of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) Merced River Salmon Hatchery. It was completed by mid-October last year. Funding for

the \$2.27 million project was provided by MID, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

“We saw salmon building nests and spawning in the restored section of the river channel only a few weeks after completion,” said Joe Merz, Principal Scientist with Cramer Fish Sciences, which oversaw the restoration work. “This project has tremendous opportunity to support salmon production on the Merced River.”

In recent years, approximately 1.25 miles of the river section has been restored through various projects. The current Instream and Off Channel Habitat Restoration Project brought the total to 1.75 miles of restored river.

Additionally, another 1,400 feet of river, approximately a half mile above Henderson Park, has been approved for restoration funding by the California Department of Water Resources. Upon completion of both projects, approximately half of the river stretch between Crocker Huffman Dam and Snelling will have been restored.

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