



MID Provides Update on Drastic Water Outlook

Begins Outreach to Growers on Drought Crisis Conditions

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MERCED, CA – Based on the ongoing drought crisis, growers within Merced Irrigation District could see a significantly shortened season and absolutely minimal allocations of water this year.

On Tuesday, the MID Board of Directors was updated on the dire outlook of water conditions for 2014. Merced County and other parts of the state are entering a third consecutive dry year.

“What we’re seeing is nothing short of unprecedented,” said MID General Manager John Sweigard. “This is a terrible situation for our growers. We have no control over the weather, but we remain committed to doing everything we can to help them.”

So far, the 2013-14 water-year marks one of the driest years on record for MID, which serves approximately 2,200 growers in eastern Merced County.

No specific decisions or actions were made Tuesday. However, in discussing the dismal water supply picture, MID officials said growers could be receiving inches of water, rather than feet. Typically, water is measured by “acre-feet.” An acre-foot is equal to one acre of land covered by one foot of water, or roughly 325,000 gallons.

Decisions about the beginning of the irrigation season, water allocations and more are typically made later in the year, closer to springtime. However, given the severe drought, MID officials wanted to begin public discussions and provide information about the dry conditions.

An aggressive outreach campaign is planned to inform growers. This will include letters and future meetings to share information and receive input from growers. MID is also developing a webpage to serve as a clearing house of information and resources for MID growers and others.

On the same day that California's governor declared a drought last week, MID management was on a conference call with leaders from the State Water Resources Control Board and Department of Water Resources. MID has requested operational flexibility for some of its requirements of the Merced River and Lake McClure.

MID officials and board members will be talking with growers in the coming weeks and months, and making a final determination about the season and how to best help them.

MID's Sweigard added that looking ahead, MID would continue to press forward with efforts to enlarge the carry-over storage capacity of Lake McClure. That proposal has been underway for at least three years. It could provide MID the ability to store up to an additional 70,000 acre feet of water in wet years, for use in dry years.

Lake McClure currently holds approximately 226,000 acre feet and is at 22 percent capacity. However, Lake McClure has a minimum pool of 115,000 acre feet. Once the reservoir falls to that level, all irrigation operations would cease and state agencies would have discretion over how the remaining water supply would be used for wildlife and stream flows.

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