



December 13, 2016

Statement on federal drought legislation

The recently passed federal WIIN-WRDA legislation marks a major milestone in Merced Irrigation District's goals of raising the spillways at New Exchequer Dam. Two crucial provisions are provided within the legislation that are intended to help move the project forward.

One provision authorizes the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to accept non-federal funding to pay for review of water infrastructure projects which improve storm-water capture.

A second provision authorizes the Army Corps of Engineers to prioritize a review of reservoir operations manuals in drought states upon request of the governor.

"The authorizations included in this legislation are of significant importance in our ongoing effort to eventually complete the New Exchequer Storage Enhancement Project," said Hicham ElTal, MID Deputy General Manager of Water Supply Rights and Supply. ElTal is the lead MID engineer overseeing the New Exchequer spillway effort. "Significant work remains. However, MID is absolutely better positioned to move forward with the project as a result of this legislation."

MID has been working on the New Exchequer Spillway Enhancement for several years. Lake McClure has a water storage capacity of approximately 1 million acre feet of water. The reservoir provides water to our community's agriculture, local environment, replenishes groundwater and protects the groundwater quality relied upon by all residents and communities in our basin for drinking water. The project would raise the spillway gates of New Exchequer Dam, allowing for up to an additional 57,000 acre feet of carryover water storage.

"We are absolutely grateful for the work done by our local Congress Member Jim Costa. He and his staff have remained engaged with MID throughout this effort," said ElTal. "We also appreciate the support we have received from other members of the Valley delegation of congressional representatives. Further, we greatly appreciate the efforts of Senator Dianne Feinstein. We look forward to all of their continued support as we proceed on this project."

ElTal noted that in spite of many beneficial provisions to other water users in the state, MID remains geographically challenged and would only benefit indirectly from the large WIIN/WRDA bill.

"Unlike many other communities and agricultural water users, we do not have a connection to the

state or federal water projects,” he said. “We are completely dependent on our locally owned and managed reservoir, Lake McClure, on the Merced River. The unpredictability of California’s wet and dry years makes this storage enhancement all that more important.”

Although greatly benefiting from the federal legislation, MID remains mired in a contentious battle over the future use of New Exchequer Dam as the State Water Resources Control Board seeks major diversions of water from Lake McClure toward the Bay Delta.

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