



MID approves budget and 2017 water season

Actions taken to benefit local groundwater in eastern Merced County

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In a host of actions today, the Merced Irrigation District Board of Directors approved the FY 2018 budget and set the in-district water rate for MID growers. The Board also approved a temporary water transfer to local growers outside District boundaries.

The water rate for MID growers was set at \$33 per acre foot. There are no restrictions on how much water may be purchased this year by in-District growers. Outside growers will pay \$75 per acre foot.

Additional information on the upcoming irrigation season will be made available in the coming weeks.

WATER SUPPLY

Following five consecutive years of drought, Lake McClure is facing the likelihood of the wettest year on record. The reservoir is currently 80 percent full and holding about 800,000 acre feet. At this time last year the, reservoir was about 15 percent full, holding approximately 151,000 acre feet.

Inflow to the reservoir is currently about 28,000 cubic feet per second (CFS) and MID is making flood-control releases of approximately 5,000 CFS to provide space for storm runoff and snowmelt.

Board actions related to the budget and water availability are typically made later in spring. However, based on the large volume of water in Lake McClure – and continuing high flows into the reservoir – the Board accelerated the schedule for establishing the irrigation season and setting the annual budget.

“There is adequate surface-water supply for MID growers as well as other local growers just outside the District’s boundaries,” said MID General Manager John Sweigard. “We want to take full advantage of this surface water for the benefit of growers and for the benefit local groundwater in eastern Merced County.”

GROUNDWATER BENEFITS

By providing all the needed surface water to MID growers from Lake McClure, they will not have to depend on individual wells to pump groundwater – which has been heavily relied on by agriculture and cities alike during the past five years of drought. Further, selling water to in-basin growers who neighbor MID’s boundaries provides them an opportunity to turn off their wells. These actions to benefit groundwater are in addition to the recharge that occurs from MID’s water deliveries each year: throughout the irrigation season, MID’s operations result in up to 140,000 acre feet of groundwater

replenishment as water flows through unlined waterways and through the District's recharge basins. The recharge of 140,000 acre feet is the equivalent of diverting 14 percent of Lake McClure into the local groundwater basin, which is used by the cities of Merced, Atwater, Livingston, as well as rural domestic wells. Management of groundwater is even more crucial at this time with the state's recently enacted Sustainable Groundwater Management Act.

BUDGET

The Board adopted a \$107.6 million budget for FY 2018, beginning April 1. Overall, the ratio of revenue to expenses remains essentially the same as the previous year's budget. The 2017 budget represents an increase of \$19.4 million in revenue over the FY 2017 budget. This is based based on a host of factors, including hydroelectric production, water availability for purchase by MID growers and in-Basin local water transfers. At the same time, operating expenses have increased by \$13.5 million compared to FY 2017. This represents legal costs associated with regulatory and legal challenges to MID's water rights, as well as millions of dollars in annual debt payments associated with the ongoing relicensing of the New Exchequer Hydroelectric Project.

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