



Merced Irrigation District plans more work on salmon habitat restoration

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Merced Irrigation District is continuing to take significant steps to support salmon on the Merced River. The District recently completed the [Merced River Instream and Off Channel Habitat Restoration Project](#). And, the District is poised to start two additional projects that directly benefit the salmon lifecycle within a key section of river used for spawning and rearing.

First, the **Merced River Agricultural Diversion Improvement Project** is currently being developed and construction work is expected to begin in the summer of 2022 or 2023. The project intends to replace up to three diversion structures used at several riparian diversion points within an approximately 11-mile stretch of river downstream of Crocker Huffman Diversion Dam above Snelling. The developing project will also improve habitat within the river near each site that's critical for salmon rearing and spawning.

Second, MID is developing restoration plans for approximately 1,400 feet of crucial rearing and spawning habitat for the **Merced River Salmonid Habitat Restoration Project – Above Henderson Park**

“At the same time we are modernizing our infrastructure and tightening up our water use, we are committed to doing our reasonable share of work to support salmon on the Merced River within our sphere of influence,” said MID General Manager John Sweigard.

Between the early and mid-1900s, state-sanctioned mining caused significant damage to a crucial stretch of the Merced River used by salmon between Snelling and Crocker Huffman Diversion Dam. The dredging resulted in crucial 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 riparian habitat needed by salmon and other natural flora and fauna.

Although MID's operations had nothing to do with the mining, the District has remained a strong advocate for restoring salmon habitat along the Merced River.

“A healthy salmon population means a healthy MID,” said MID’s Sweigard. “There are many reasons to engage in these projects. But the most-simple one is this: it’s the right thing to do.”

Merced Irrigation District has continued to advocate and support restoration of the river. Most recently, MID completed the Merced River Instream and Off Channel Habitat Restoration Project.

This 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. 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.

In recent years, approximately 1.25 miles of the river section has been restored through various projects. The recent **Instream and Off Channel Habitat Restoration Project** brought the total to 1.75 miles of restored river. Upon completion of the Above Henderson Park project, just over two miles will have been restored, not including the Diversion site project which is still being designed.

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