



Water Storage Project Makes Progress in Congress

Bill Passes and Paves way for Possible Federal Study

For Immediate Release: February 5, 2014

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WASHINGTON, DC – Legislation was passed today in Congress that aims to help pave the way for increased water storage in Lake McClure.

Specifically, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Sacramento-San Joaquin Valley Emergency Water Delivery Act. The 68-page federal bill addresses a host of water issues in California. It includes language related to MID’s proposal to increase the carry-over capacity of Lake McClure, MID’s storage reservoir.

If MID’s project were to eventually be completed, it could enable the District to capture and store additional water during wet years and carry it forward for use in dry years. MID is proposing increasing its spillway height by up to 10-feet, allowing for up to 70,000 acre feet of additional water. Before the project proceeds, it would require a review by federal regulators.

MID has sought legislation to allow for such a review since 2011.

The Emergency Water Delivery Act passed in the House today was introduced by Rep. David Valadao, R-Hanford. The language benefiting MID was originally introduced last year as a “stand-alone bill,” H.R. 934. That bill was introduced by Rep. Tom McClintock and cosponsored by Rep. Jim Costa who represents Merced County.

“We are facing an unprecedented drought. There has never been a more-clear view of the need for increased storage,” said MID General Manager John Sweigard.

Lake McClure is at historic low levels. The District expects to have less than 80,000 acre feet of surface water to provide to 100,000 acres of ag land this season. MID expects the lake level to reach minimum

pool this year, at which time all irrigation diversions from the reservoir cease. Similarly, MID expects hydroelectric operations to also cease in the coming months at New Exchequer Hydroelectric Project.

Between October and December, Lake McClure received less than 10 percent of the average inflow – the lowest level recorded according to records dating back to 1903.

Three years ago, during a wet year, MID released 1 million acre feet of spring runoff to the Pacific Ocean. If the spillway project had been in place, the District could have stored up to 70,000 acre feet of that water to carry over for use in a dry year.

The legislation passed today does not mandate that the spillway project be built. Rather, it would help pave the way for consideration and review by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. This would subject the proposal to a rigorous environmental review and public examination.

The water stored in Lake McClure provides a host of benefits. Among them are irrigation water, recreation, environmental uses and groundwater recharge of an aquifer that's relied upon by the cities of Atwater, Livingston and Merced, as well as most unincorporated areas of Merced County. Up to 100 megawatts of emission-free electricity are also produced through hydroelectric generation on the reservoir's New Exchequer Project.

The legislation must still be considered by the U.S. Senate to advance.

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