

# THE Current



MID's Monthly Newsletter

June 2013



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#### Board of Directors

Div 1: Tim Pellissier,  
President  
Div 2: Scott Koehn  
Div 3: Dave Long, Vice  
President  
Div 4: Kevin Gonzalves  
Div 5: Billy Pimentel

#### Board Meetings

Merced Civic Center  
678 W. 18th Street  
Merced, CA 95340

The first and third  
Tuesday of every month at  
10:00 am.

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## SPECIAL REPORT: HICHAM ELTAL, MANAGER OF WATER SUPPLY AND RIGHTS



*MID will contribute more than 100,000 acre feet of water to our community's groundwater, which is used by the cities of Atwater, Livingston and Merced. This is more than the 60,000 acre feet of groundwater MID will pump from the aquifer this year.*

## Groundwater and surface water both meet our community's supply needs

Most people know that Merced Irrigation District provides irrigation water and electricity. What they don't know is how our water system works. In fact, MID uses both water flowing out of Lake McClure and water pumped up from under the ground. The biggest surprise to most people is that MID actually puts more water back into the ground than it pumps out.

How is that possible?

#### Follow the water

MID operates what's coined a "conjunctive use" system in the water industry. In wet years, with plenty of snow and rain, MID relies heavily on "surface water" **See "Report" Back Page**

## Congress advances bill to increase water storage

WASHINGTON, DC – Merced Irrigation District is another step closer to having more water storage. A key committee in Congress passed legislation this Spring that's aimed at providing a federal review of the Lake McClure Spillway Modification Project.

Specifically, H.R. 934 was passed by the House Natural Resources Committee with a vote of 26-15. It is expected to soon be considered by the

full House of Representatives.

The legislation is being sponsored by Rep. Tom McClintock, who represents Mariposa County. Rep. Jim Costa, who represents Merced County, is the lead Democrat cosponsor of the bill and voted in favor of it during its committee hearing.

"This bill simply does **See "Bill" Back Page**

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flowing downhill from Lake McClure. This provides 99 percent of the water MID delivers to its 2,200 growers. During dry years, MID must rely on more water pumped from the ground with less available in the lake from snowmelt. This year MID's total water supply may include 20 percent of pumped groundwater.

This occasional higher extraction of groundwater is significantly offset by an abundance of recharge to the Merced Groundwater Basin Aquifer every year. MID's extensive conveyance system includes more than 600 miles of open earthen channels and local streams. These waterways allow a portion of the water flowing down the waterway to also flow down into the groundwater – even in the driest of years.

For instance, this year MID will contribute more than 100,000 acre feet of water to our community's groundwater. This is more than the 60,000 acre feet of groundwater MID will pump from the aquifer this year.

In wet years, MID's contribution to

groundwater can exceed 150,000 acre feet. In comparison, municipal water consumption of groundwater from the same aquifer typically is approximately 45,000 acre feet.



*MID began delivering water to the Cressey-Winton recharge basin in 2011. Within less than three months, MID has delivered at least 1,300 acre feet of water to the aquifer used by agriculture and the cities of Merced, Atwater and Livingston. The basin is used to assist in recharge of groundwater during years when water is available from Lake McClure.*

It is easy to see that MID's contribution to the community's groundwater is more than twice the amount used for domestic consumption in dry years and three times that in wet years.

**Why does MID operate groundwater wells?**

If MID failed to provide water to its growers, they would likely drill their own private wells. Once the well has been dug and activated, a grower will use it in both wet and dry years due to convenience and investment. However, this practice would significantly strain the aquifer – far more than the occasional pumping MID might do.

During a drought, urban and agriculture users both tend to extract higher amounts of groundwater for their landscapes, pools, and crops. The water level drops as a result of the longer dry period during times of drought. Just as a glass of water would quickly empty with 25 straws in it, groundwater levels also fall during times of high demand from multiple users.

At MID, we are proud of the fact that we are the sole entity in the local community to help return water to the aquifer. That's especially true in drought years.

**Continued From Front: "Bill"**

what should have been done when the designation was made in 1992: conform the Wild and Scenic River boundary to the pre-existing FERC boundary. That's all this bill does," remarked Congressman McClintock. "And by adjusting the boundary, it begins a study that could lead to an increased supply of clean electricity and water, additional groundwater recharge, additional jobs and all the spin-off benefits at no cost to taxpayers – for communities that are now being crushed by some of the highest unemployment rates, highest electricity prices, and most preventable water shortages in the country."

"As we face this year's water crisis, it is clearer than ever that we must do more to improve water reliability in the Valley," said Mr. Costa. "We have both long- and short-term challenges, but boosting storage capacity is a critical part of the solution. This common-sense bill is a no brainer that will help keep our economy moving in the dry years, and I urge the Speaker bring it to a vote soon."

If the full House of Representatives

passes H.R. 934, it will also have to be taken up by the Senate and then signed by the President.

Under the legislation, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) would then have authority to review MID's pro-



*A bill pending in Congress could allow MID to raise it's spillways to store more water.*

posal to raise the height of its spillways by up to 10 feet. The small modification would allow the District to capture up to an additional 70,000 acre feet of water during wet years and put it to use during dry years.

The spillway modifications would cause temporary increases in water levels in approximately 1,800 feet of the Merced

River where it joins Lake McClure. These increases would occur about once every three years and last only between two and eight weeks.

That section of river is currently part of MID's existing hydroelectric boundary as defined by FERC.

However, that same boundary has subsequently been overlapped by the Wild and Scenic River designation. That in turn has prevented MID from formally proposing any increased storage in Lake McClure. The legislation does not authorize the project. Rather it would allow MID to formally submit the proposed project for consideration by FERC under its full and transparent environmental review process.

"It has taken a significant amount of work from our legislators, MID staff and our community to get this far," said MID General Manager John Sweigard. "We still have a long road ahead of us. However, I remain optimistic we will continue making progress and am appreciative of all the hard work from those involved with this effort."