

# THE Current

MID's Monthly Newsletter

July 2013



## Training Day

### MID Main Office

744 W. 20th Street.  
Merced, CA. 95340  
(209) 722-5761

### Customer Service

Water: (209) 722-2720  
Electric: (209) 722-3041

### Automated Water

(866)825-2475

### 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.

### Mailing Address

PO Box 2288  
Merced, CA 95344

### Websites

[www.mercedid.org](http://www.mercedid.org)  
[www.lakemclure.com](http://www.lakemclure.com)



Above, Sean Tierney instructs firefighters before they enter the water. At right, rescuers reach a staged car accident.

Recently, MID partnered with Merced City firefighters, allowing them to conduct canal rescue training. The training was carried out by placing a SUV inside a canal in order to replicate a collision of a vehicle into a canal. A water-certified firefighter acted as the victim as firefighters practiced and trained their rescue techniques.



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## FROM THE HEADGATE: MID GENERAL MANAGER JOHN SWEIGARD

### Planning for the Future

When most people think of the work done by Merced Irrigation District, they imagine our crews working on our ditches, canals and power lines. This is an absolutely critical function of any irrigation district, and MID is particularly proud of the work done by its employees. However, there is another equally critical roll served by MID that's often not seen: protecting the District's water rights and

maintaining local control over water management that benefits our entire community.

MID is the sole provider of surface water used to replenish the region's aquifer, and this is of absolute importance to our entire community.

Due to the challenging financial times and continual external threats to our water rights, the time has come for MID to embark on a plan to address its numerous challenges with long-term

solutions. Among the issues to be considered are MID's operational, maintenance and system modernization, as well as its financial health.

MID's Water Resources Department has historically operated with a deficit. That means the revenue from in-District water sales is less than the cost of operations, maintenance and improvements. This deficit

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"This was a great opportunity for the firefighters, MID and our community," said MID Water Superintendent Mike Silva. "Obviously nobody wants to think of something like this happening in real life. But the reality is we know our emergency responders must be prepared and we were glad we could help them."

The vehicle was provided by Merced City Tow and stripped of gasoline, oil and anything that could be hazardous to the quality of water in the canal.



Above, Merced firefighters prepare to enter the water and conduct rescue training.



At left, fire trucks line the El Capitan Canal near southwest Merced.

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has typically been offset with revenue from water transfers to other water districts or for environmental benefits – such as the Vernalis Adaptive Management Plan (VAMP). Such water transfers have historically helped ensure some of the most affordable water rates in the state for MID growers.

VAMP, a 12-year management study of juvenile salmon on the San Joaquin River, provided a significant – and steady – stream of dependable revenue to MID. However, the agreement expired in 2011 and the District's other water transfers have either ended or will end in the near future.

Anticipating the loss of revenue due at the end of VAMP, MID re-organized, reduced staff and cut costs. In addition to cost cutting, MID has raised its water rates and relied on short-term water transfers and reserve spending to balance its budget. This is not a sustainable approach.

Earlier this year, the MID Board directed staff to present it with a long-term plan to ensure a financially stable, well-run district far into the future.

Subsequently, the MID Board approved the pursuit of a "Water Resources Management Plan." Once completed, the plan will provide a comprehensive solution to the District's water resource management issues for the next 20 to 30 years. The fundamental goal of the plan is to ensure

MID maximizes and protects the District's water rights.

Among the additional benefits:

- Updates and provides a single-source document listing all of MID's various water rights and policies.
- Provides MID and the public it serves with a comprehensive plan for future maintenance and capital improvement projects and costs.
- Provides a financial analysis and guidelines for meeting the District's financial needs.
- Ensures that the District remains in a sound financial position well into the future.

In short, the plan aims to give MID staff and growers alike the "long view" of water operations and financial planning for the District. The plan will also serve as a guiding document to address requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act for future projects.

As the plan is developed, it will include significant technical expertise and include input from the community and MID's customers and employees. Its development will be a transparent and open process, providing long-term guidance to help the District continue to protect its water rights and stabilize its finances.

To fund the plan's development, The Board has approved a one-time water sale to the neighboring San Luis Water District in Merced County.

Before the MID board supported the transfer, it had been previously discussed and recommended by the Merced Irrigation District Advisory Committee.

There is no question this was a difficult decision in a dry year. However, it has also been well understood that the District is making a trade-off: MID is providing water to another local water district in order to generate revenue that will be used to guide and protect MID's long-term water rights and water supplies. This will also include financial support for efforts related to the relicensing of the Merced River Hydroelectric Project, the key to MID's water and storage rights.

It is clear there is no end in sight to the barrage of challenges we face in protecting our local water rights. We cannot continue down a path of making year-to-year decisions about critical components of MID's long-term operations.

Now is the time for the District to develop a long-term plan that will guide our resource management and pave a direction toward a bright and sustainable future.