

THE Current



MID's Monthly Newsletter

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FROM THE HEADGATE: MID GENERAL MANAGER JOHN SWEIGARD



MID's Bryan Kelly and Mike Silva make their way to inspect a water control structure that is part of the Garibaldi Lateral Water Conservation Project, southwest of Livingston. The project was put into full use this year. With some 13,000 feet of pipeline and 14,000 feet of canal re-lining, the Garibaldi project is helping MID conserve and re-use approximately 5,600 acre feet of water each year. Kelly, left, is Deputy General Manager of Water Resources and Silva, right, is the District's Water Superintendent.

By John Sweigard, General Manager

As irrigation season wraps up, we have been as busy as ever – both with our irrigation operations and our ongoing work to protect our local water rights.

CHALLENGING WATER SEASON

This was not an easy year but with everyone work-

ing together, we are managing to pull through. Much of the success was the result of significant cooperation between growers and MID employees.

Given the difficult circumstances, this year MID allowed the transfer of un-used allocated water from one MID grower to another. The District also allowed private groundwater wheeling and exchanges between in-

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State bill to aid MID energy costs advances

SACRAMENTO, CA – Legislation aimed at helping Merced Irrigation District minimize its electric fees to customers has passed the state legislature and will proceed to the governor.

"We are absolutely grateful for the significant work of our local legislators on Senate Bill 591," said MID Deputy General Manager Don Ouchley. "This bill represents a significant step in the District's ongoing efforts to minimize state-imposed fees

under California's clean-energy mandate."

In 2011, the legislature established a law requiring all utilities to have 33 percent renewable energy by the year 2020. The law precluded hydroelectric generation as a source of renewable energy. This included MID's New Exchequer Hydroelectric Project at Lake McClure.

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SB 591 aims to allow MID to count a portion of its hydroelectric generation toward its renewable-energy purchase requirements.

The legislation marked a bipartisan effort: it was authored by Senator Anthony Cannella, R-Ceres, and co-authored by Assembly Member Adam Gray, D-Merced.

The offset and financial benefit to MID's ratepayers will depend on the amount of hydroelectricity produced at the New Exchequer Hydroelectric Project in a given year. That amount is dependent on the amount of water stored in Lake McClure based on inflow to the reservoir and outflow requirements by state regulators.

MID remains absolutely committed to



MID workers perform maintenance on one of the District's many transformers. MID is trying to minimize energy costs from a state mandate.

clean, renewable energy – including hydroelectricity which produces zero carbon emissions.

"We are proud that we are the first public utility to sponsor and collaborate with the UC Solar Institute based at UC Merced," said MID's Ouchley. The Solar Institute is developing solar technology and working to decrease the cost of solar energy.

For more than two years MID has been involved in discussions with legislators and top officials at the California Energy Commission regarding the renewable energy mandate.

"We will continue to do everything possible to minimize the fees passed on to MID customers, and we remain extremely grateful for the diligent work and support of our local legislators," said MID's Ouchley.

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District growers. Additionally, MID implemented the Supplemental Water Supply Pool Program from groundwater sources. It assisted growers by providing increased water supply to those who requested it, in addition to their surface water allocation.

We will all obviously be keeping a close eye on the weather this winter and hoping for the best. Toward the end of September, Lake McClure was at approximately 30 percent of storage capacity. As with other reservoirs in California, ours is in desperate need of wet weather this year.

PROTECTING OUR WATER

In mid-September, MID had the opportunity to testify on the state's current dry conditions. Specifically, I discussed the unique challenges faced by MID growers during a joint meeting of the California Water Commission and the State Board of Food and Agriculture.

This provided an excellent opportunity to discuss the water challenges our local community faces with those who have the ability to influence water policy in Sacramento.

Among those invited to testify were Mark Cowin, Director of the Department of Water Resources; Randy Record, Chair of the Association of California Water Agencies; and Mike Wade, Executive Director of the California Farm Water Coalition.

During the hearing, I discussed the ongoing regulatory challenges faced by our operations and our growers. Specifically, the State Water Resources Control Board is currently considering plans to increase the flows down the Merced River, leaving less water in storage for irrigation and groundwater recharge in eastern Merced County.



Lake McClure will be at less than 30 percent of its capacity as the season comes to a close.

During my testimony, I stressed that there is no comprehensive approach to addressing threatened salmon, and multiple agencies have different plans. I also noted that while agriculture water users must report on their beneficial use of water, no report or benefit analysis is required by government agencies for their environmental water use.

I think the answer is simple. As long as regulatory and environmental agencies have no accountability, there will be no improvements for salmon. That in turn means our water supplies will continue to be threatened.

I also discussed the need to address non-flow stressors which impact salmon. These include ocean conditions, salmon-harvest policies, non-native sport fish, and the loss of floodplain habitat around the San Joaquin Delta. Those issues are well outside the bounds of MID's control. It is incumbent that state regulators address these issues rather than simply demanding more water from upstream east-side irrigation districts.

We cannot continue to perform the same

failed "take-more-water" actions over and over. Not only is it doomed for failure, it has real world consequences for the people who live and work in the San Joaquin Valley.

Nine of the State's major reservoirs are below historic average levels, and six of these are below 50 percent total capacity.

MID receives its water from Lake McClure, owned and operated by the District. The lake has limited storage capacity. Although it was nearly full in 2011, again, as of late September it was approximately at 30 percent capacity.

Long before the current two-year drought, MID began exploring the possibility of increasing its storage on Lake McClure. It has proposed making adjustments to its infrastructure, allowing the District to capture an additional 70,000 acre feet of water in wet years for use in dry years.

Before the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission can review such a proposal, it would need Congressional approval. MID, working with local members of Congress, has introduced federal legislation to provide it.

In 2012, H.R. 2578 was passed out of the House of Representatives, but was not taken up by the U.S. Senate. Currently, H.R. 934 is awaiting action by the House of Representatives. Both bills have had bipartisan support from Valley lawmakers, including Jim Costa, who represents Merced County.

