



Congressional Bill Would Lead to Study of More Storage at Lake McClure

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WASHINGTON, DC – Bipartisan legislation that could pave the way for more water storage in Lake McClure has been introduced by local members of Congress.

The legislation, H.R. 934, would authorize the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to review a proposal to modify the spillways at Lake McClure. The project would enable Merced Irrigation District to capture and store additional water during wet periods that occur every few years.

The bill was introduced by Reps. Tom McClintock, who represents Mariposa County and Jim Costa, who represents Merced. Republican Rep. McClintock is principal sponsor of the bill and Rep. Costa was the leading Democratic co-sponsor. The House passed similar legislation in the last Congress after it was introduced by Rep. Jeff Denham, R-Modesto, with bipartisan support from Valley Members of Congress. The current bill is also being co-sponsored by Mr. Denham and fellow Valley Congress Members Devin Nunes, David Valadao and Kevin McCarthy, a top member of the Republican Leadership. Rep. Doug LaMalfa, a Republican Member of the Committee on Natural Resources from the Sacramento Valley, also is co-sponsoring the bill.

“More storage is needed and it’s needed now,” said MID General Manager John Sweigard. “To understand the critical importance of this project, we need to look no further than the current drought conditions plaguing our state and the prospect of a third dry year on the horizon. Three years ago, during a wet year, MID released 1 million acre feet of spring runoff to the Pacific Ocean. If this project were in place, we would have stored enough water to supply 25,000 acres this year. Instead, we must rely on dwindling groundwater reserve.”

By raising the spillways by up to 10 feet, MID could capture an additional 70,000 acre feet of water during wet years for use in dry years, such as California is currently facing.

The legislation does not mandate that the spillway project be built. Rather, it allows FERC to consider the proposed project. This would subject the proposal to a rigorous environmental review and public examination.

Congressional action is necessary because the proposed spillway project would affect an existing Wild and Scenic Rivers boundary for the Merced River by causing occasional, temporary inundations of about 1,800 feet of river channel above Lake McClure. Such inundations already occur naturally. However, federal law does not permit FERC to review projects or operations that would otherwise affect the Wild and Scenic boundary.

The legislation would move the Wild and Scenic River Boundary approximately 1,800 feet upstream to coincide with MID's existing FERC hydro project boundary.

"At a time when California is suffering increasingly scarce water supplies and paying among the highest electricity prices in the nation, this legislation will allow for both increased water storage and additional hydropower generation," remarked **Rep. McClintock**. "The benefits of a minor adjustment to the boundary rescue this desperately needed resource from truly outrageous bureaucratic red tape."

"As we face a looming water crisis this year, it is more important than ever that we continue to explore long-term solutions that improve water reliability throughout the state," said **Rep. Costa**. "Though there is no silver bullet to solve our water challenges, increasing storage at Lake McClure would give us another tool to prepare for dry years. Boosting storage is taking out an insurance policy to protect jobs and keep our economy moving."

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 used 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 Dam.

"We are grateful to have continued bi-partisan support and stand ready to provide any support needed to see this legislation succeed," said MID's Sweigard.

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