



Workshop for long-range water plan discusses future priorities, alternatives

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Members of the public attended a workshop this week to receive the latest updates on the Merced Irrigation District's Water Resources Management Plan (WRMP). The meeting was a joint session including the MID Advisory Committee as well as the MID Board of Directors.

The District is approaching the final development stages of its long-range plan, the WRMP. In addition to serving as a planning guide, it will serve as a District-wide Programmatic Environmental Impact Report for future infrastructure and operations improvements. The Plan also includes the development of MID-specific computer hydrological models, as well as a financial model, that have been used to help guide policy discussions and decision-making.

A key objective of the WRMP is to ensure that the process is stakeholder-driven. Since the development process began, there have been numerous public meetings. Some of these meetings were used to present attendees with technical analysis, such as land-use projections. Other workshops actively sought input on potential resource policy issues, such as on the water conveyance system modernization plan or whether to consider offering Class II growers a one-time opportunity to buy up to Class I status.

During Tuesday's workshop, the various potential water management strategies (or alternatives) were reviewed in detail. These alternatives were compared against the WRMP goals developed early in the process.

The alternative that compared most favorably to the WRMP goals includes the following strategies:

- Providing Class II growers an opportunity to pay a one-time fee to become Class I MID growers, which will benefit both the grower and the groundwater basin
- Development of a long range capital improvement plan that updates and modernizes the water conveyance system, consisting of regulating reservoirs, canal automation and improved flow measurement, among other things
- Strategically utilizing water transfers to help fund future capital improvements, federal relicensing, operations and maintenance expenses

At the next WRMP workshop, tentatively scheduled for mid-August, the MID Board will consider authorizing MID staff to proceed with the Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (PEIR). The PEIR, the last stage of the WRMP process, will evaluate the various alternatives previously considered, including the preferred alternative, from an environmental impact perspective.

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