



State Water Board Adopts Final Bay Delta SED

MID: our community is prepared to fight as long and as hard as is necessary to protect our region's water supply

For Immediate Release: December 13, 2018

Contact: Mike Jensen

209-354-2856

mjensen@mercedid.org

Merced Irrigation District has vowed to take any and all action necessary to protect the region's water supply after the State Water Board adopted the Bay Delta SED Plan Wednesday evening.

"Every resident in California should be concerned. If the state succeeds in setting this legal precedent on our backs in the disadvantaged San Joaquin Valley, this can happen to any community in the State of California," said John Sweigard, General Manager of Merced Irrigation District.

The long-expected vote Wednesday by the State Water Resources Control Board solidifies the state's intent to take up to 50 percent of eastern Merced County's water supply and send it north to the Bay Delta. The Bay Delta serves as the state's water hub providing vast amounts of water to communities throughout the Bay Area, and Central and Southern California.

"The State has ignored thousands of pages of science and data that counter the Bay Delta SED plan. The state's plan will fail to meet its own objectives of improving salmon numbers. And in its failing, it will cause irreversible devastation to our local water supply, water quality and economy," said MID's Sweigard.

The State Water Board is comprised of five members appointed by the Governor of California and its staff. The State Water Board staff proposed the Bay Delta SED several years ago for the purported benefit of improving salmon populations.

Merced Irrigation District owns and operates Lake McClure. The reservoir is located in the Sierra Nevada foothills: it provides local water supply, flood control, hydroelectric generation and water for the local environment and wildlife preserves.

Backed by scientific and biological studies, MID has repeatedly stated that simply diverting more water away from eastern Merced County will not support salmon.

Most of the historical, natural floodplain habitat around the Bay Delta and Merced River has been reclaimed and converted to farms and cities. Significant parts of the waterways flowing to the Bay Delta have also been altered by human activity causing loss of floodplain habitat for salmon rearing. At the same time, juvenile salmon are subject to predation in the rivers and in the Delta by non-native predatory bass: in fact, juvenile salmon from the Merced River hatchery are currently transported in trucks around the Merced and San Joaquin Rivers, and most of the Delta, to avoid predation.

For years, Merced Irrigation District has sought to support the state's objectives of improving salmon populations on the Merced River through a reasonable settlement proposal. In 2016, the Merced River S.A.F.E. Plan (Salmon, Agriculture, Flows, and Environment) was unveiled by MID. This would have:

- Provided immediate increased flows on the Merced River during key salmon lifecycle times.
- Restored 5.5 miles of salmon-rearing habitat – destroyed decades ago by dredge mining – on the Merced River, near Snelling.
- Addressed predation from non-native bass.
- Made investments in the Merced River Salmon Hatchery to increase production.

“MID staff, our biologists, and our community have supported efforts to address the salmon lifecycle locally on the Merced River within our region. However, it is absolutely unreasonable to demand our community's water supply be diverted for the benefit of others as part of a misguided attempt to mitigate environmental problems created by others three counties away,” said MID's Sweigard.

“MID is willing to participate in a reasonable comprehensive salmon improvement program – which includes additional, logical amounts of water in the Merced River. However, our District and our community are prepared to fight as long and as hard as is necessary to protect our community's water supply.”

The State Water Board has held one local, public meeting in Merced to discuss the Bay Delta SED. That was a one-day hearing less than a week before Christmas in 2016.

###