



MID General Manager calls on every resident in eastern Merced County to contact governor

“State moving ahead with plans to take half your water”

For Immediate Release: December 8, 2021

Contact: Mike Jensen
209-354-2856 (office)
209-201-6199 (cell)
mjensen@mercedid.org

Merced Irrigation District General Manager John Sweigard today urged every resident of eastern Merced County to contact Governor Newsom and the State Water Resources Control Board.

“They are coming for your water, and they are coming for it now. It is that simple. It is incumbent on every resident in the community to help protect your water supply. Once your water is gone, it will never come back” Sweigard said.

MID has provided contacts and easily downloadable letters at www.SaveMercedWater.com

Under the state’s Bay Delta Water Quality Control Plan, every resident in Atwater, Merced, Livingston and the surrounding areas will lose:

- Drinking water quality and their historic water supply.
- Hundreds of household-supporting jobs and hundreds of millions of dollars in the local economy.
- Recreation at Lakes McClure and McSwain, including camping, fishing, boating, and more.
- Local environmental benefits including water flowing through local streams, such as Bear Creek, year-round.

The call to action from MID’s General Manager followed a lengthy meeting by the State Water Resources Control Board today. During the meeting, discussions were held about how to proceed with implementation of the Bay Delta Plan. The plan will take up to half of eastern Merced County’s water supply from Lake McClure and send it north to the Bay Delta. From there the water can be exported to other farms and cities throughout the state.

Dozens of organizations participated in the Sacramento meeting and lobbied for the State Water Board to move swiftly to begin diversions of water from Lake McClure to the Bay Delta. Several comments were made urging the Board to begin diverting the water as early as this winter through use of emergency orders.

“This is absolutely as real as it gets. The governor and the State Water Board need to hear from every single resident,” said Sweigard.

“Lake McClure was not built by the state or federal government,” he added. “Your community built and paid for this reservoir a century ago. MID has responsibly managed this resource to maximize local water supply, flood control, environmental benefits and recreation. If the state succeeds, half of your water supply will be lost forever.”

The State Water Board is comprised of five unelected members who are appointed by the Governor of California. The State Water Board staff proposed the Bay Delta Water Plan several years ago for the purported benefit of improving salmon populations and improving water quality in the Bay Delta.

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, support of the statewide electric grid, and water for the local environment and wildlife preserves. The water from Lake McClure is crucial for helping replenish local groundwater used by cities and provides water to farmers in eastern Merced County.

For years MID has advocated for supporting salmon on the Merced River but stated that water quality problems in the Bay Delta were not created by residents of eastern Merced County.

“It is not our community that is illegally diverting water from the Delta, dumping pollution into it, or over exporting fresh water from it,” said Sweigard. “Our community should not bear the brunt of addressing problems they didn’t cause, located three counties and more than a hundred miles away.”

Backed with tens of millions of dollars in environmental science on the Merced River, MID has repeatedly told the State Water Board that simply taking water away from eastern Merced County will not support salmon. Most of the historical, natural floodplain habitat around the Bay Delta has been carved into cities and farms. Habitat for spawning and rearing along key sections of the Merced River were destroyed decades ago by invasive mechanical mining – which was sanctioned by the state, not MID.

MID has advocated and helped complete significant environmental projects to restore Merced River salmon habitat in eastern Merced County. MID was also among the first water purveyors in the State to offer an alternative settlement agreement for supporting salmon on the Merced River. Both Governor Brown and Newsom had said they welcomed “voluntary settlement agreements” with California water purveyors who are affected by the Bay Delta Plan.

In 2016, MID offered the S.A.F.E. Plan (Salmon, Agriculture, Flows, and Environment). MID’s alternative proposal offered to immediately increase flows of water down the Merced River during key salmon lifecycle events. The MID S.A.F.E. Plan also called for the restoration of more than five miles of salmon habitat on the Merced River; addressed predation of juvenile salmon by non-native bass; and made investments in the Merced River Salmon Hatchery.

State environmental leaders and the State Water Board rejected the MID plan saying it didn’t provide enough water. In 2018, the Board adopted a final version the Bay Delta Plan. Then in October this year,

state officials said they were done with efforts to reach settlement agreements and were moving forward with the Bay Delta Plan's implementation.

Today, the State Water Board discussed the various ways the Bay Delta Plan could be implemented.

"The Bay Delta Plan and its water grab from eastern Merced County have been talked about and planned for years," said MID's Sweigard. "Today, it became clear the planning is over and the actions to take your water are about to begin."

###