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For immediate release

Merced officials tell State Water Board to leave Valley water where it belongs: *in the Valley*

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MERCED, CA – As the State Water Board neared a final decision on its Bay Delta Plan SED, significant opposition was carried to the state capitol from the local Merced area this week.

Last Monday, more than 1,500 people opposed the State Water Board’s Bay Delta Plan SED during a rally at the steps of the State Capitol. More opposition was delivered to the State Board during a two-day hearing at the State Water Resources Control Board.

Among those opposing the plan were Merced Mayor Mike Murphy, Merced County Supervisors Daron McDaniel and Lloyd Pareira. State and federal representatives – including Assembly Member Adam Gray, Senator Anthony Cannella and Congress Member Jim Costa – also offered opposition. On behalf of Merced Irrigation District, General Manager John Sweigard testified about multiple flaws in the Bay Delta Plan SED. The Merced Farm Bureau also had a strong showing at the Capitol.

At specific issue is the State’s Bay Delta Water Quality Control Plan SED. The plan would divert up to 50 percent of the water flowing into Lake McClure, sending it away from eastern Merced County and into the San Francisco Bay Delta. The water in Lake McClure provides water for local agriculture, the environment, groundwater replenishment, recreation, local wildlife refuges and more.

Lake McClure currently experiences water shortages about two out of five years. Under the State Water Board’s Bay Delta Plan SED, water shortages in Lake McClure are predicted to occur every other year.

“The Water Board’s proposal to send more of our surface water out to the ocean would decimate the Central Valley’s economy, water quality and quality of life,” said Jerry O’Banion, Chairman of the Merced County Board of Supervisors. “Alternatives have been proposed to the Water Board that

would improve salmon populations while avoiding this unprecedented water grab – they’ve gone unheeded. We will continue to fight for our water and our Valley.”

Merced Mayor Mike Murphy also took issue with the plan.

“If the state takes Merced River water it will have a crushing effect on the Central Valley,” said Murphy. “For a disadvantaged community like Merced, it will mean the loss of more than 3,000 jobs and \$29 million to the local economy.”

In testimony before the State Water Board, MID’s John Sweigard pointed out numerous flaws in the Bay Delta Plan SED, including noting the document assumes salmon would benefit from floodplain habitat. In fact, that habitat no longer exists along vast stretches of the Merced River and the San Joaquin River. Further, significant amounts of salmon-rearing habitat in the Bay Delta has been completely taken over by cities and farms created by reclaiming floodplain. Sweigard noted that the plan includes multiple false assumptions, including that the region could depend on currently-dwindling supplies of groundwater to offset the losses of Merced River water.

“This issue has deliberately been cast as a false choice between salmon or farmers. This is, in fact, a choice between bad environmental assumptions and an entire community,” MID’s Sweigard said after the hearing.

“The consequences of this plan will harm children, senior citizens and everyone in between. And it will do so in one of the already poorest and most disadvantaged communities in the state. We can produce more salmon – we know how to do that already. If this plan is implemented it will devastate our local agriculture, our economy and our drinking water.”

According to the state Bay Delta Plan SED document, the water diversions would result in an annual increase in salmon ranging 2,059 to 7,637. That number includes salmon on the Merced River, as well as on the Stanislaus and Tuolumne rivers. Between 2012 and 2016, an average of 169,400 salmon were caught in California, according to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. (Full report [here](#)).

The State Water Board had initially intended to consider adoption of the final Bay Delta Plan SED during the hearings last week. However, the State Water Board received a request from Secretary of Natural Resources Agency John Laird requesting action be delayed in pursuit of finding compromise solutions between the State and irrigation districts in the San Joaquin Valley. The hearings continued this week but no action was taken.

Merced Irrigation District has established and promoted an alternative since 2016, the [Merced River S.A.F.E. Plan](#) (Salmon, Agriculture, Flows and Environment). The plan calls for immediate increases in Merced River flows during key spawning times; increased salmon production at the Merced River hatchery; restoration of habitat on the Merced River destroyed by dredge mining decades ago and

addressing non-native bass predation of migrating juvenile salmon. The plan has so far been dismissed by the state.

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