

THE Current



MID's Monthly Newsletter

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WATER & POWER

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FROM THE HEADGATE: MID GENERAL MANAGER JOHN SWEIGARD



Lake McClure, at left, holds 226 AC FT of water. That is less than 22% of its capacity. Once the lake reaches 115,000 AC FT MID must seize water diversions.

Dire Water Picture Predicted as Drought Drags

Based on the continuing three-year-long drought, MID and its growers find themselves in a crisis. Growers within MID will most likely see a significantly shortened season with absolutely minimal allocations of water this year.

The drought conditions we face are nothing short of unprecedented, and represent a terrible situation for our growers. Although MID

has no control over the weather, our entire team is committed to doing everything we can to help them.

As of January, the 2013-14 water-year marks one of the driest years on record for MID, which serves approximately 2,200 growers in eastern Merced County.

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MID Begins Work on Long-range Management Plan

Protection of local water rights. Long-term financial planning. Prioritizing infrastructure projects.

Those are just a few of the many benefits of MID's upcoming Water Resources Management Plan process. Work has been well underway on the long-range plan since January. It will ultimately help guide crucial MID deci-

sions for decades to come.

"This will be an open, transparent and public process as we proceed," said MID General Manager John Sweigard. "MID has a host of operations, departments and enterprises. This planning document will bring all the information, data and ideas to-

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gether and will serve as the guidebook for operation and priorities for many years to come. This is truly a pivotal moment, not only for MID customers but for our entire community."

The Water Resources Management Plan is similar to a general plan used by a city or county in identifying future development, infrastructure and financial needs.

Among its key benefits will be the inclusion of a Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (PEIR). That means in most instances the document will serve as the legally required environmental study for immediate projects and proposed programs. The environmental review will also be used as the baseline environmental docu-

ment for future projects and programs. This has tremendous benefit in helping expedite future actions and reducing their costs.

Specific benefits of the plan for MID growers include:

- Providing a centralized inventory of all MID water resources.
 - Identification of historical and forecasted land use within MID's 164,000 acres.
 - Identification and prioritization of infrastructure needs.
 - Addressing certain policy and long term operational issues.
 - Long-range financial planning and identification of funding sources.
- Numerous opportunities will be provided

for the public to provide input. The earliest outreach will help direct attention to critical issues in need of analysis. The assessments and analyses will take a number of months to complete and progress will be reported publicly along the way.

"This report will be a tremendous benefit to the District and its Growers," said Bryan Kelley, MID Deputy General Manager of Water Resources. "We look forward to working with the community on this plan and developing a document that will help to provide for the long-term viability of the District."

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Decisions about the beginning of the irrigation season, water allocations and more are typically made closer to springtime. However, given the severe drought, I believe it's imperative to begin public discussions and provide information about the dry conditions. This sentiment has been echoed in recent weeks by a number of local farmers, including those with the MID Advisory Committee.

An aggressive outreach campaign is planned to inform growers. This will include letters and future grower meetings to share information and receive input. We also are busy developing a webpage to serve as a clearing house of information and resources for MID growers and others.

MID will do everything possible to remain engaged. On the same day that MID requested operational flexibility for some of its requirements of the Merced River and Lake McClure, California's Governor issued a drought declaration. Later that day I was on a conference call with leaders from the Natural Resources Agency, the State Water Resources Control Board and the Depart-



Lake McClure's spillway stands high above the water line. The district is proposing raising the spillway by up to 10 feet allowing for more water storage during wet years.

ment of Water Resources. During the call, I made it clear we expect action on our request sooner than later, given these unprecedented circumstances.

In the coming weeks and months, we will continue talking with growers and receive your ideas and suggestions as we face this crisis together. A final determination about the irrigation season will be made some time after that.

Looking ahead, MID will continue to press forward with efforts to enlarge the carry-over storage capacity of Lake McClure. Such a proposal has been

underway for at least three years. It could provide MID the ability to store up to an additional 70,000 acre feet of water in wet years, for use in dry years.

Lake McClure currently holds approximately 226,000 acre feet and is at 22 percent capacity. However, Lake McClure has a minimum pool of 115,000 acre feet. Once the reservoir falls to that level, all irrigation operations will cease and state agencies would have discretion over how the remaining water supply would be used for wild life and stream flows.

As we move closer to irrigation season, we will continue to do everything possible to keep communications open with MID growers. We are facing a dire water picture for 2014 but all of MID is committed to assisting our growers as best as we can.