



MID to growers: continuing drought will result in season without Lake McClure water allocation

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MERCED, CA – Merced Irrigation District officials have warned local growers that they should expect no initial allocation of water from Lake McClure for the upcoming season. However, minimal supplemental irrigation water will be made available by the District through conjunctive groundwater pumping in areas where it is feasible.

“We are clearly facing severe impacts from a fourth year of drought conditions,” said MID General Manager John Sweigard. “We are going to have a difficult year. As always, our entire staff is committed to doing all we can to assist our growers.”

The water storage at Lake McClure remains at just 8 percent heading into March. Under federal and state regulations, no stored water can be diverted for irrigation once the reservoir has fallen below 11.5 percent, or 115,000 acre feet.

The reservoir has a capacity of just over 1-million acre feet. It was last full in 2011. Each year since then has been progressively dryer within the Merced River watershed.

Although surface water from Lake McClure is not currently available, MID has informed its growers that it intends to move ahead with its Supplemental Water Supply Program. This is a voluntary program allowing growers to purchase minimal water from MID. The water will be made available by conjunctive groundwater pumping. Growers interested in the program should contact MID Customer Service to determine if their parcel is in an area that can be served by wells: 209-722-2720.

Throughout its history, MID has operated as a conjunctive-use district: it replenishes groundwater upward of 100,000 acre feet each year with water from Lake McClure. In dry years, MID pumps a portion of that water back out for its growers’ use. MID expects to provide less than 60,000 acre feet of its conjunctively managed groundwater this year. That is a fraction of the 300,000 to 400,000 acre feet of surface water that would typically be provided to MID’s 2,200 growers from Lake McClure.

MID Board members and staff discussed the upcoming irrigation season at two public meetings in February: first at a regularly scheduled Board meeting, and again at a town-hall gathering with growers held at the Merced Fairgrounds. The presentation can be found on the MID website by clicking on the [Drought Watch page](#) at www.mercedid.org.

In the coming weeks, MID will provide additional information about the Supplemental Water Supply Program, and prepare water applications for distribution to growers. The District will also be closely watching the weather and storage in Lake McClure.

“Certainly we are all hoping for the best – which would be some late-season snow storms,” said MID General Manager Sweigard. “However, from a planning perspective, both MID and our growers need to continue to prepare for the worst.”

Sweigard also added that, in addition to the current drought, MID and its growers are likely to face significantly reduced water allocations more frequently as a result of the state’s intent to divert more water away from the Merced area and to the Bay Delta. (See Bay Delta Water Plan [here](#).)

“The state’s plans are not only going to hurt MID growers directly but everyone else in our community,” said Sweigard. “Ag and its support industries remain the largest job producers in our community.”

For the latest information, growers may visit the [Drought Watch page](#) at www.mercedid.org or call the District office at 209-722-5761. Questions specific to water orders should be made to 209-722-2720.

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