



Congress advances bill to increase water storage in Lake McClure

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WASHINGTON, DC – Merced Irrigation District is another step closer to having more water storage. A key committee in Congress passed legislation today that’s aimed at providing a federal review of the Lake McClure Spillway Modification Project.

Specifically, H.R. 934 was passed by the House Natural Resources Committee with a vote of 26-15. It will next be considered by the full House of Representatives.

The legislation is being sponsored by Rep. Tom McClintock, who represents Mariposa County. Rep. Jim Costa, who represents Merced County, is the lead Democrat cosponsor of the bill and voted in favor of it during the committee hearing today.

“This bill simply does what should have been done when the designation was made in 1992: conform the Wild and Scenic River boundary to the pre-existing FERC boundary. That’s all this bill does,” remarked Congressman McClintock. “And by adjusting the boundary, it begins a study that could lead to an increased supply of clean electricity and water, additional groundwater recharge, additional jobs and all the spin-off benefits at no cost to taxpayers – for communities that are now being crushed by some of the highest unemployment rates, highest electricity prices, and most preventable water shortages in the country.”

“As we face this year’s water crisis, it is clearer than ever that we must do more to improve water reliability in the Valley,” said Mr. Costa. “We have both long- and short-term challenges, but boosting storage capacity is a critical part of the solution. This common-sense bill is a no brainer that will help keep our economy moving in the dry years, and I urge the Speaker bring it to a vote soon.”

If the full House of Representatives passes H.R. 934, it would also have to be taken up by the Senate and then signed by the President.

Under the legislation, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) would then have authority to review MID's proposal to raise the height of its spillways by up to 10 feet. The small modification would allow the District to capture up to an additional 70,000 acre feet of water during wet years and put it to use during dry years.

The spillway modifications would cause temporary increases in water levels in approximately 1,800 feet of the Merced River where it joins Lake McClure. These increases would occur about once every three years and last only between two and eight weeks.

That section of river is currently part of MID's existing hydroelectric boundary as defined by FERC.

However, that same boundary has subsequently been overlapped by the Wild and Scenic River designation. That in turn has prevented MID from formally proposing any increased storage in Lake McClure. The legislation passed today does not authorize the project. Rather it would allow MID to formally submit the proposed project for consideration by FERC under its full and transparent environmental review process.

"It has taken a significant amount of work from our legislators, MID staff and our community to get this far," said MID General Manager John Sweigard. "We still have a long road ahead of us. However, I remain optimistic we will continue making progress and am appreciative of all the hard work from those involved with this effort."

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