

THE IRRIGATOR



Modesto Irrigation District Water Operations Newsletter



2024 IRRIGATION SEASON OVERVIEW

Jason Word, Irrigation Field Services Manager

Another irrigation season is underway! Crop forecast letters (CFL) have been sent out and it's crucial that you have these filled out and returned to MID no later than May 1. If your CFL is not returned by May 1, whatever we have on file from the past year will stand for the 2024 irrigation season. If you have any new land leases or purchases not listed on the CFL, please be sure to contact the Irrigation Field Office. Additionally, should you plan to irrigate these properties, please make sure that they are in irrigation status.

We understand that following your usage in a year of abundant water may not be as critical, but we would like to remind you of the importance of keeping up to date on your usage and billing. You can do so on MID's online irrigation account portal available via MID's web site – mid.org.

In response to feedback from our farmers, we are pleased to announce that we have recently added the option to pay your bill online through the irrigation account portal. This is a convenient and secure way to ensure that your bill is paid on time.

We have also noticed an increasing number of farmers who prefer to receive communication through email. This is an area that we would like to continue to expand. To receive email communications, click the link on the irrigation web page and provide us with your contact information, including your email address. This will help us to keep you informed and up to date on any important information or changes.

Thank you for your cooperation, and we look forward to another successful irrigation season.

**IRRIGATION SEASON
START DATE**
March 20

ALLOCATION
42 inches, uncapped
with replenishment
water available

**CROP FORECAST
LETTERS**
Due May 1

ONLINE SERVICES
Use MID's irrigation
account portal to
check your usage and
pay your bill

WATER SUPPLY OUTLOOK

John Mauterer, Senior Water Resources Analyst

Water Year 2023 ended on September 30, 2023, and it's not an exaggeration to say it was truly epic for the Tuolumne watershed. MID continued to benefit from this bounty throughout the 2023 irrigation season, with an uncapped full allocation. These conditions led to total Don Pedro storage ending the water year at almost 400,000 acre-feet greater than the recent average for that day.

WATER YEAR 2023 HIGHLIGHTS



78 inches of snow-water equivalent - 260% of historic average



62 inches of rainfall in watershed - second most rainfall in history



4,150,000 acre-feet of runoff - third most since 1900



Unfortunately, the first three months of Water Year 2024 did not provide a continuation of the wet conditions, with precipitation accumulations totaling only 4.5 inches in the Tuolumne watershed and 2.7 inches in Modesto. Likewise, the snowpack was approximately 36% of the recent historical average on December 31, 2023. Fears of renewed drought conditions were expressed in the media, and statewide water officials began planning for reduced water deliveries.

However, as we ushered in the new calendar year, the long-established atmospheric blocking patterns softened, allowing the mass transport of moisture into the state. Since January 1, 2024, the Tuolumne watershed precipitation index has tallied 19.3 inches of precipitation while the MID Modesto rain gauge has observed 9 inches, driving the respective season totals to 95% and 124% of average. Similarly, Tuolumne basin snowpack has grown to about 82% of the historic average.



In response to these quickly changing conditions, MID and TID have once again initiated the dynamic release of water from Don Pedro into the lower Tuolumne River to create storage space for inflows resulting from the inbound storms. Conscious of the potential safety issues related to flood-control operations, the District releases have been shaped to account for uncontrolled Dry Creek flow to ensure that flood-prone areas in Modesto will remain dry.

Considering the residual Don Pedro water supply from last year and the recent accumulations in the watershed, MID staff recommended an uncapped 42 inch allocation with replenishment water available to District growers and started the irrigation season on March 20.

DITCH TENDER RETIREES

Jason Word, Irrigation Field Services Manager

After 23 years of steadfast service, Mark Pieczarka bids farewell to his role as Reservoir/Main Canal Tender in Area 1. Throughout his tenure, Mark's unwavering commitment to excellence ensured that diversions and deliveries ran seamlessly, earning him the admiration of both colleagues and the community. As he embarks on this new chapter of his life, we extend our heartfelt appreciation and best wishes for a fulfilling retirement.

With Mark's departure, MID proudly welcomes Fred Albertoni as the incoming Area 1 Reservoir/Main Canal Tender. Fred's extensive experience and demonstrated dedication make him well-equipped to uphold the District's standards of excellence. His passion for his position and commitment to the District and our customers make him an ideal fit for this vital role.

Furthermore, as Fred transitions, we're pleased to announce Cristian Jimenez as the new Area 3 Ditch Tender. With a proven track record of diligence and a deep understanding of MID operations from his time as the Eastside Night Tender, Cristian is poised to excel in his new capacity. The District has full confidence in Cristian's abilities to effectively manage Area 3, and looks forward to his continued contributions to MID's success.

DITCH TENDER INFORMATION

| | | |
|--------|----------|--|
| Area 1 | 652-7326 | Chuck Birdsong & Fred Albertoni |
| Area 2 | 652-7082 | Matt Dickens & Sergio Chavez |
| Area 3 | 652-7114 | Johel Arreguin & Cristian Jiminez |
| Area 4 | 652-7077 | Jorge Camarena & Bailey Terra |
| Area 5 | 652-7118 | Thomas Helms & Alex Anderson |
| Area 6 | 652-1268 | Tony Esquivel & Blake Lemos |
| Area 7 | 652-9813 | Kyle Bizzini & Levi Heinrich |

NIGHT TENDER INFORMATION

| | | |
|-----------|----------|-----------------------------|
| Areas 1-3 | 652-7124 | Nathan Heimstra & Vacancy |
| Areas 4-7 | 652-6198 | Scott Payton & Phil Fuentes |

CIVIL ENGINEERING UPDATE

Jesse Franco, Civil Engineering Manager

The Civil Engineering Department is comprised of three sections: Water Resources, Engineering Design and Land Survey.

In 2023, the Civil Engineering Department continued our commitment towards the planning and design of projects that ensure reliability, efficiency, and regulatory compliance of the irrigation conveyance system. To support this commitment, a notable milestone was accomplished after years of planning and analysis. The Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for the Comprehensive Water Resources Management Plan (CWRMP) was completed and adopted by the Board of Directors. Completion of the PEIR will serve as the catalyst to implementation of the capital projects.

The District's irrigation conveyance system is truly a testament of the innovation and forward thinking by the agricultural pioneers of our Central Valley; a remarkable gravity system that spans over 40 miles. While it has been serving our community for over a century, it is in need of upgrades to adapt to the changing operations of our customers.

Today, the tradition and responsibility of innovation and forward thinking is carried forward in the planning and construction of projects that will strengthen and modernize the irrigation conveyance system for continued operation. Over the next several years our efforts will be concentrated on capital projects such as regulating reservoirs, head gate improvements, pipeline replacement and SCADA upgrades. Additionally, water resources planning will also be an area of focus, especially with respect to groundwater sustainability.

As development continues within our community, Civil Engineering has also been coordinating with the cities, Stanislaus County and developers on proposed projects that impact irrigation facilities to ensure continued service to our customers.

WINTER PROJECTS

This winter presented several surprise storms that impacted project construction and maintenance. Despite the challenges, MID staff completed significant construction activities. The following projects were completed by a joint venture of Engineering and Construction Maintenance staff over the course of the winter months.

Lower Main Canal Lining Repair

During the 2023 irrigation season, it was discovered that part of the lining on the Lower Main Canal near Lateral 1 Headworks, west of Waterford, had been undermined and washed out. This ended up requiring approximately 200 feet of the Lower Main Canal to be reinforced and replaced. This portion of the Lower Main Canal is vital to conveying irrigation water to our irrigators. MID field staff performed the work and ensured that our system is ready for the coming season.



Modesto Reservoir Dam 1 & 6 Lining

The Modesto Reservoir, built in 1911, is an operationally critical facility at MID for irrigation and domestic water, as well as a popular recreational site for the surrounding area. Multiple times a year the dams around Modesto Reservoir are inspected by both MID staff and California Division of Safety of Dams (DSOD). It was determined that repairs done to the joints in the lining on Dams 1 and 6 several decades ago were showing wear and needed to be replaced. MID Construction staff repaired over 20 joints on Dam 1 and two joints on Dam 6 using new water-stop materials as well as full replacement of the lining in some instances. These repairs have since been inspected and approved by MID Engineering staff and DSOD ensuring the safety and durability of Modesto Reservoir.

Lateral 2/Highline Headworks Gate Replacement

Lateral 2 and the Highline Lateral share a headworks site located between Modesto and Waterford. The two existing automated gates were experiencing operation issues due to the length of service and deterioration of the gate components. The existing gates were replaced with new automated gates that can adjust to field conditions. This site can be controlled remotely through the District's SCADA system to ensure steady water level.

Dry Creek Spill Gate Replacement & Automation

Dry Creek Spill is located on the MID Lower Main Canal between Modesto and Waterford and allows for emergency spill of the Lower Main Canal into Dry Creek. The facility consists of three gates that, similarly to Lateral 2 and Highline, were experiencing operational issues due to the length of service and deterioration of the gate components. The existing gates were replaced and modernized to automated gates that can adjust to field conditions. This site was also upgraded with new electrical components and to be controlled remotely through the District's SCADA system.



GROUNDWATER

Gordon Enas, Assistant General Manager of Water Operations

Modesto Subbasin Groundwater Sustainability Plan

MID is a member of the Stanislaus and Tuolumne Rivers Groundwater Basin Association Groundwater Sustainability Agency (STRGBA GSA) which covers approximately 250,000 acres in Stanislaus County lying between the Tuolumne, Stanislaus and San Joaquin Rivers. STRGBA GSA has the authority and responsibility to manage the groundwater basin and submitted Modesto Subbasin's Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) to the Department of Water Resources (DWR) on January 31, 2022.

Almost two years later on January 18, 2024, DWR determined the GSP to be incomplete and identified deficiencies in the plan. The deficiencies outlined by DWR can be summarized in two points:

1. The subbasin needs a domestic well mitigation program. This type of program would provide for replacement of domestic wells impacted by declining groundwater levels.
2. The subbasin needs a backstop. If the projects and management actions either (a) don't materialize and/or (b) don't materialize in the magnitude predicted, what will the subbasin do to mitigate unsustainable groundwater extraction. This requires the establishment of a demand management program. Demand management can take many different forms - fallowing, idling, multi-benefit land repurposing, or implementation of a groundwater allocation.

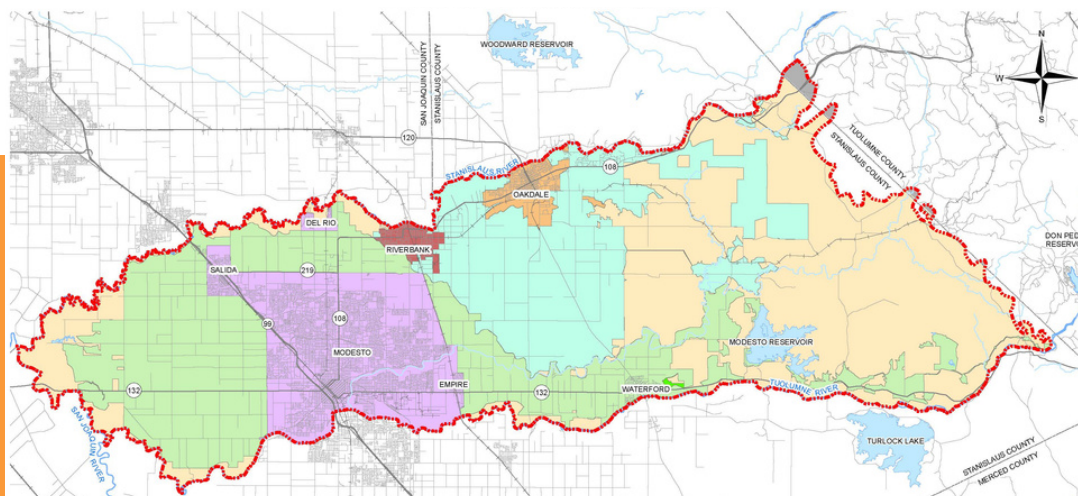
The STRGBA GSA has 180 days (no later than July 16, 2024) to address the identified deficiencies by DWR in the Modesto Subbasin GSP.

Long-Term Groundwater Replenishment Program

On August 8, 2023, the MID Board of Directors approved a long-term Groundwater Replenishment Program (LT-GRP) for the Modesto Subbasin. The LT-GRP is a voluntary, 20-year program that allows landowners within the Modesto Subbasin to receive MID surface water in years when surface water is plentiful, to help replenish groundwater.

The implementation of the LT-GRP is both timely and significant as it's exactly the type of project that will satisfy DWR's requirements outlined in their January 2024 letter and help mitigate the overdraft conditions over the next 20 years.

Program details, including the application and pricing, are available at mid.org. MID will also be holding grower workshops in the coming months to discuss the LT-GRP and its impact on the Modesto Subbasin.



RELICENSING, VOLUNTARY AGREEMENTS, RESTORATION... WHERE ARE WE AT?

John Davids, Executive Director of Water Resources

A year ago, staff reported on the signing of a memorandum of understanding to advance the Tuolumne River Voluntary Agreement (VA) and Tuolumne River-specific term sheet. So, what has happened in the last year you might ask? The answer is a lot (kind of, although nothing moves too quickly in California water)....

Don Pedro Relicensing

Let's get the easy stuff out of the way first – an update on the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) proceedings. The update is short and sweet, the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) was released by FERC on July 7, 2020. Since that time and with the acknowledgment of FERC, we have focused our time and efforts on the Tuolumne VA, knowing (hoping) that it would serve as the basis for a revised 401 water quality certificate from the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB). Absent a new license and as we have done since 2016, MID and Turlock Irrigation District are operating on annual licenses (with the original license conditions).

Substitute Environmental Document (SED) and Voluntary Agreements

Phase I of the SED was focused on the Lower San Joaquin River, specifically the Merced, Tuolumne, and Stanislaus Rivers. In December 2018, the SWRCB adopted amendments calling for 40% unimpaired flow (UIF) from the San Joaquin River tributaries. Not surprisingly and at the direction of the MID Board of Directors (Board), MID filed suit both individually and as part of the San Joaquin Tributary Authority (SJTA). After much to do about the administrative record, the record was certified (for what it is worth, the administrative record in the case is well over 700,000 pages), and the case was set for oral argument. After several days of oral arguments, all parties rested on October 24, 2023 and Judge Acquisto took the pending claims under submission. On Friday, March 15, 2024, the court ruled completely in favor of the State Water Resources Control Board's unimpaired flow proposal. We are extremely disappointed in this decision and will continue to evaluate the court's decision and weigh potential next steps.



With Phase I “out of the way” in 2018, the SWRCB turned their attention to Phase II – the Sacramento/Delta update to the Bay-Delta Plan. The Draft Phase II Staff Report (renamed from what was called the SED in Phase I) was released in September 2023. While 40% UIF on the Lower San Joaquin was staggering in and of itself, Phase II includes an adaptive UIF flow range of 45% to 65% with the preferred alternative being 55%! As you might imagine, the Phase II parties are in utter disbelief. The comment period on the Draft Phase II Staff Report concluded on January 19, 2024 bringing an end to a lengthy review and public comment period. As you might imagine, MID along with its partners on the Tuolumne River, submitted both legal and technical comments on the Draft Phase II Staff Report.

So, what about the VAs? For starters, the VAs are now referred to as Healthy Rivers and Landscapes (has a good ring to it). The VAs are still very much alive and currently sandwiched between the outcome of the Phase I litigation and a firestorm of activity concerning Phase II. Where are the parties on the Tuolumne? – right in the middle of it all, actively engaged and continuously advocating for the same reasonable, balanced, and science-based solution that we have advocated for over the course of the last several years. As public water agencies (Tuolumne and Phase II parties), we hear that the SWRCB has questions on the Healthy Rivers and Landscapes proposal and as such, we are working on a late April hearing before the SWRCB, where the VAs will be thoroughly unpacked and further vetted – we hope this answers all of the critics. While the April hearings are focused on the Phase II parties, the Tuolumne will have a role both now and later this year when the revised Scientific Basis Report for the Tuolumne VA is released. While the SWRCB Board members (at least a majority of them) and staff still seem anything but supportive of the Healthy Rivers and Landscapes proposal, we hope the Governor’s Office is listening and watching with a keen eye on what is the best of all Californians.

Habitat Restoration

Despite an anything but certain regulatory landscape, the parties on the Tuolumne River took an important and historic step to advance a sweeping package of habitat improvements on the Lower Tuolumne River. This is the stuff that brought me back in some capacity to MID. I’m too old to plan to plan, I want to see action – trucks moving, excavators working, aggregate being sorted, material being placed in the river, and subsequently fish using the new habitat. It was done on the Stanislaus River years ago through implementation of the Honolulu Bar Project and it was one of the most rewarding projects of my career. To that end MID, TID, and the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission took action in December 2023 to team up with River Partners and Applied River Sciences to design and implement a collaborative, holistic habitat restoration program along the Lower Tuolumne River to improve the health and long-term recovery of the fishery and the local communities it serves. What is the magnitude of the no-regrets action – \$80 million. This commitment isn’t predicated on State and/or Federal budgets – this effort is self-funded. We are proud of this commitment and hope the State is too.

So that’s it, an update on FERC, the VAs, and habitat restoration. In retrospect, a lot has actually happened over the last 12 months. Most importantly, as I look east from my office in Oakdale, the snow capped peaks of the Sierra’s remind me that a good water year is in store for MID irrigators. For those of you who have gotten this far, thank you for reading. As a broader team, we remain committed to finding a path through all of the regulatory haze that allows this community to flourish and thrive for generations to come.

MID WATER OPERATIONS DIVISION

Monday - Friday | 8 A.M. - 5 P.M.

(209) 526-7562

www.mid.org

Name
Address 1
Address 2
City, State ZIP

P.O. BOX 4060
MODESTO, CA 95352

