

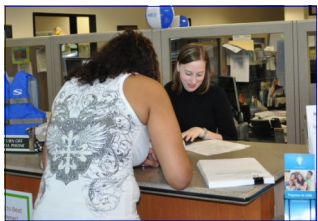
THE *Main* CANAL

MID's Monthly Newsletter

August 2011



MID Extends Customer Service Hours



As part of its ongoing effort to best assist customers, Merced Irrigation District has extended its customer service operating hours.

Based on recent customer input, MID's new phone and office customer hours are now 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday. The extended hours, changed from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., were made possible by staggering shifts and the working hours of existing staff.

MID's Main Office is located at 744 W. 20th St., Merced. Water customers may continue to call (209) 722-2720 and Electric customers may continue to call (209) 722-3041.

In addition, existing water customers may also order water around the clock, seven days per week, on the web at www.mercedid.org or with the automated phone order system at (866) 825-2475.

Moving Water is No Small Task

Each irrigation season, enough water to fill 6 million backyard swimming pools flows from Lake McClure in the foothills to more than 2,200 growers in Merced County. Along the way, the water travels through an 800-mile-long canal system with thousands of irrigation gates, spillways, laterals, weirs and gates – all of which must be operated and maintained.

Keeping the system

running efficiently is no small task. It takes common sense, communication, diplomacy and a devoted work ethic.

Just ask Rich White, who has been a Distribution System Operator (commonly referred to as a "ditch tender") with Merced Irrigation District for more than 10 years.

"It takes teamwork, good relationships with your growers, the growers' irrigators, and your fellow ditch tenders," said White early

one morning in July as he rolled along the canal banks southwest of Merced checking on the water flows he had set earlier in the day.

MID's Water Operations Department is comprised of a host of water managers, engineers, administrators, equipment operators, water operators and maintenance crews. As a team, they are responsible for keeping the system clean and ensuring operations run smoothly. However, it is the District's ditch tenders, like White, who are on the frontlines ensuring growers receive their water and getting the work done on the ground.

The tools of the trade are visible in White's truck cab: a flashlight, a measuring tape, a weir rule, a binder full of orders and a laptop computer. However, the most important tool of the ditch tenders is their knowledge of the system. And that comes only with years of experience. The operators

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MID Apprentice DSO Alfonso Cervantes begins his workday.



FROM THE HEADGATE: MID GENERAL MANAGER JOHN SWEIGARD

Merced Irrigation District is a unique public agency. MID provides irrigation water to growers, competitively priced electricity to local homes and businesses, operates five park and recreation areas, provides concession services at Lakes McSwain and McClure and operates the 110 Mega Watt New Exchequer Hydroelectric Project.

Every MID employee serves a critical role, whether it is the lineman who keeps electricity flowing to your home or the ditch tender who keeps water flowing to your field.

In all these resource areas, a host of regulatory, legislative and legal issues continually challenge public utilities such as MID. It is more important than ever that we have the best possible legal

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representation. As such, I am pleased to announce the recent hiring of a new, full-time in-house General Counsel, Phillip R. McMurray. A resident of Los Banos, Mr. McMurray brings years of experience providing legal representation to a number of public agencies and water districts. His services will include providing legal guidance needed to protect MID's resources and representing the district at administrative law hearings, regulatory hearings and judicial proceedings. Throughout his career he has worked on such key Valley water issues as the Delta Habitat Conservation and Conveyance Program, the San Joaquin River Restoration Program, and the Grassland Bypass Project.



Phillip R. McMurray

In other news, MID is continuing work on its relicensing of the New Exchequer Hydroelectric Project. In the coming weeks, we will begin several environmental studies required by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. As part

of the relicensing process we are also continuing to seek federal approval to modify our existing spillways – not the New Exchequer Dam. This will allow for the additional temporary storage of up to 70,000 acre feet of water during wet years. Such a project would require numerous environmental reviews. We are optimistic that legislation currently making its way through Congress will allow those studies to proceed and the possibility of the increased storage project becoming a reality.

In recent months, we have been as busy as ever working to protect and improve our community's resources. We have also been working diligently to expand and improve our partnerships in the community. MID was pleased to host the Greater Merced Chamber of Commerce's monthly business connector at Lake Yosemite in July. This was an excellent opportunity to connect with community leaders of Merced County and discuss opportunities for MID to support and continue improving the local economy. MID currently employs nearly 200 of our neighbors. Our resources and operations directly and

indirectly support approximately 3,600 jobs and \$120 million in economic activity.

As you likely know, local rivers have seen excessively fast and high flows as a result of the large snowpack this year. Throughout the Valley there have already been several tragedies. There was recently a near-tragedy in our own backyard on the Merced River above Snelling. Please remember to use extreme caution when recreating in or around Valley rivers this summer. In many places, currents continue to run high, cold and fast. We want our community to enjoy the summer and water recreation, but we also want everyone to remain safe. In the coming weeks, MID will increase its flows down the Merced River as part of its required relicensing studies for New Exchequer Dam. We will do everything possible to notify the public when that occurs and there will again be elevated danger and risk from high, cold, fast moving flows.

I have said it often, but will say it again: MID is here to serve you. Our doors are always open and we stand ready to provide any assistance possible.

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must keep track of which growers are using water and how much is being used.

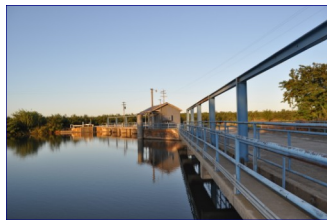
They need to know when the water is turned on and when it is turned off. They need to understand how the water travels and how long it takes to travel from grower to grower. They must know how to line up their orders to best serve the grower and get their irrigation supply to them as quickly – and as safely—as possible. They must maintain adequate pressure in the canals without overtopping the waterways. And they do all this with a constant barrage of calls from customers, fellow operators and managers.

"It's a lot to juggle," said White.

According to Mike Higgins, MID's Assistant Water Operations Manager, not everyone is cut out for the work. All operators begin as apprentices and must gain experience and pass testing requirements to move up as operators. They work 12-hour shifts, seven days a

week, every other week during the irrigation season and may work more hours than that during the peak irrigation months of July, August and September.

Crocker Dam, at right, stores irrigation water for southwest Merced County.



"You have to be dedicated, to work for yourself," said Higgins.

MID takes water orders in-person, over the phone, and through the Internet with a computer or smartphone.

Despite the technological advancements

and improvements, the work still comes down to the ditch tender and his or her knowledge of the irrigation system, their opening or closing of a gate, and their constant communication with growers.

"Our ditch tenders know the fields their water irrigates. They know the flows that will likely be needed before an order has been placed by a grower. And most of them have a knowledge of the system that becomes almost instinctive," said MID General Manager John Sweigard, who himself served as a night patrolman and ditch tender on the District's canals 20 years ago. "These are the men and women who move the 300,000 acre feet of water each irrigation season through the distribution system to the growers. In every sense of the word, they are eager, willing and standing by to 'serve' MID's customers."



Your Water, Your Power – Our Way of Life!