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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Flood Control Facilities Handle Massive Storm Flows

Water Officials Warn Community to Maintain Level of Preparedness As Rain, Snowmelt Pose Ongoing Danger for Remainder of Season

MERCED, Calif. – Although Merced Irrigation District facilities have successfully handled record inflows of water produced by a series of storms coupled with melting Sierra snow, area residents should continue flood-preparedness measures for at least the next several months.

"We're not out of the woods by any means," said Ted Selb, Assistant General Manager for Water Resources. "Because our water storage facilities have been pushed to capacity, MID and area communities will have to remain on alert, not only in the days ahead, but throughout the rest of the rainfall and snowmelt season."

"Lake McClure and the New Exchequer Dam have done their job. The system absorbed flows from the Yosemite flooding, and we held back releases when inflows downstream of the dam picked up," Selb explained. "Without the flood-control capability of New Exchequer, several communities along the Merced River could have been inundated."

Lake McClure has a capacity of 1,024,600 acre-feet, and reached a level of 976,071 acre-feet today, within 5 percent of capacity or "essentially full," according to Selb.

The amount of water flowing into the lake has fallen off, and releases from the dam have been set at 8,000 cubic-feet-per-second (CFS) since 5 a.m. this morning. Release rates may remain between 6,000 and 8,000 CFS for the rest of the year.

"We no longer have a reservoir," said Selb, explaining why MID is cautioning area residents to continue flood preparedness activities and be aware of the ongoing threat. "It's now a wide spot on the Merced River."

At midnight Thursday a flood emergency condition was declared by MID, because a combination of high inflows to Lake McClure, and the 1:30 p.m. Thursday cutoff of water releases from New Exchequer Dam to prevent adding to high water inflows downstream.

At midnight Thursday, releases of 2,000 CFS began. At 4 a.m. these were increased to 6,000 CFS. Meanwhile, inflows into Lake McClure have steadily decreased, from 80,000 CFS at midnight Thursday to 57,000 CFS at 5 a.m.

Selb said no serious flooding has been reported along the Merced River, and he thanked MID personnel, local officials, emergency and law enforcement personnel, and members of the community for working together through the recent ordeal.

MID officials said the New Exchequer Dam handled the greatest volume of water since it was completed in 1967. This week's peak inflows were gauged at 85,000 CFS, a rate not experienced since 1955, when they peaked at 101,000 CFS.

As part of its contribution to the effort, MID provided 6,000 sand bags and sand for emergency workers and residents.

While the emergency has abated and cooler weather promises to reduce snowmelt, MID will remain at the highest state of readiness, said Selb.