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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MID Announces Irrigation Season Kickoff

MERCED, Calif. – The Merced Irrigation District plans to launch the 1998 irrigation season on Friday with technological innovations coming online.

"We certainly have the water this year, with 154 percent of normal snow water content in the Merced River watershed in Yosemite," said Ted Selb, MID Assistant General Manager for Water Resources. "That means more than 950,000 acre-feet of water is expected to flow into Lake McClure between April and July."

These projected high inflows into the reservoir mean a temporary water supply surplus exists. The reservoir is expected to fill this year, thanks in part to wet "El Nino" weather.

This liquid bounty makes water available to "Sphere of Influence" growers outside the District itself, as well as adjacent customers in the El Nido Irrigation District and LeGrand-Athlone Water District.

Selb said MID is closely watching the development of a "Pineapple Express" storm system approaching the central Pacific Ocean that will impact regional weather beginning Sunday afternoon and extend into next week. "Lake McClure-available storage is in great shape to absorb these storms, though they could affect the irrigation schedule," explained Selb.

The system start-up schedule calls for water to be diverted from the Merced River to the Main Canal on Friday morning at 10:00 a.m., with a flow of 300 cubic feet per second (CFS). The intention is to fill the system slowly over a period of a week. If the storm is severe, the river diversion will cease.

At 8:00 a.m. Monday, March 23, Distribution System Operators (DSO's) will be in their designated areas. As water fills each distribution area, irrigation will begin in that area. Water should be available in all areas of the District by Monday, March 30.

As the Main Canal fills with the first flows of the season, MID officials will put to the test the first phase of a new, high-tech water monitoring and automated flow management system, explained Hicham Eltal, Manager of Engineering, Water Resources.

Called Supervisor Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA), the new system allows computerized, real-time monitoring of water levels and remote operation of flow-

controlling headgates, said Eltal, engineer on the project. Currently installed throughout the system, SCADA is expected to be fully operational in all 15 sites by August. Individual sites will become operational in a phased manner, beginning with the Main Canal. The project will allow MID to manage its water distribution system more efficiently.

With SCADA, the canal system can be controlled from a central location in a manner similar to a long-distance phone network or an automated transit system. The goal is to reduce customer waiting periods for water deliveries, and to move water within the distribution system to meet irrigation needs rather than bringing in more water from storage.

Also, spill recovery systems on the Livingston Canal, Bear Creek and Mariposa Creek will re-use water that would have been lost, further improving efficiency.

These projects, as well as other canal-capacity enhancements already completed, are being financed through the 1993 Certificate of Improvement Bond issue for the District. Water-related improvements in the five-year period will total \$5.5 million of the more than \$7.3 million districtwide bond.

"The system is better than ever and it's ready for water," said Selb.

For the fifth-straight year, water prices will remain unchanged.

This year's water surplus situation comes after a similarly wet season last year. Total water sales in 1997 exceeded 343,000 acre-feet, a total MID hasn't seen since 1984. This year's season starts a month later than last year's, but the District may come close to the previous year's water sales figure, Selb said.

The MID Water Order Office will be open for business beginning Monday, March 23, at 7 a.m. The telephone numbers for the Water Order Office are: Local Area, 722-2720; Livingston & Snelling Area, (800) 750-2720.