

MERCED RIVER STAKEHOLDERS MEETING MINUTES 2006

JANUARY 2006 MINUTES

Merced River Stakeholders MEETING MINUTES January 23rd, 2006

These meeting minutes summarize main discussion points that arose during the meeting, as well as any agreements by the group for action. They will be reviewed for approval by the stakeholders at their next regular meeting.

The Stakeholders' meeting was held from 6:00pm-8:00pm at the Merced Agricultural Center in Merced, CA. Approximately 25 stakeholders attended the meeting, including representatives of the public, landowners, agency and special interest groups; the attendance sheet will be attached to the Final Meeting Minutes and placed on file with East Merced Resource Conservation District, 2135 Wardrobe Ave., Merced, CA.

The Key Outcomes Memoranda from September 2005 meeting, and agenda for this meeting, were approved.

1. Transitions

Teri Murrison was thanked for her three years service as facilitator of the Merced River Stakeholders. Gwen Huff was introduced as the new facilitator.

2. Summary of Merced River Projects

EMRCD (Gwen Huff and Cindy Lashbrook) – Submittal of three grant proposals – streambank stabilization, invasive weed project and citizen involvement. Continuing work on permit coordination, landowner workshops, community forums, irrigated lands waiver, water quality monitoring, environmental education with schools and Alliance Newsletter.

Upper Merced Watershed Council – (Nancy McConnell and Terry McLaughlin) Continuing work on citizen water quality monitoring, native weed removal and the Merced River Alliance.

Merced Irrigation District – (Ted Selb) Flood control releases; Vernalis Adaptive Management Program; Feasibility of salmonid passage at Crocker-Huffman dam; Steelhead habitat study above Crocker-Huffman dam; Salmon smolt out migration survival study; water temperature studies in Merced River; San Joaquin River basin wide temperature model; East San Joaquin Water Quality framework.

Merced County Planning Dept – (Jeff Wilson) Two permits for gravel mining in the Merced River watershed are still under review - Wade and Black Diamond. Lakeview properties is proposing a subdivision near Henderson Park. Merced County is just beginning the process of updating its general plan. There will be opportunity for public involvement.

Stillwater Sciences – (Pete Downs) Merced River Ranch - Results are available for baseline monitoring at MRR and an interim report on the revegetation experiment. Planning for in-channel restoration is underway.

Bio-Assessment for fish, birds and macro-invertebrates along the entire length of the river is expected to begin in spring. Stillwater partnered with EMRCD on two of the grant proposals listed above, streambank stabilization and invasive weeds.

River of Words – (Ocean Jones) Environmental education with students at Merced High School. Upcoming events:

Apr 15 – Great Valley Book Writers Conference, Merced. April 20 – River of Words, Sierra Club. April 28 – Poetry Festival, Merced.

Restoration- (Pat Brantley CDFG) Restoration projects on the Merced River are coordinated among several state and federal agencies, including US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Dept of Fish and Game (DFG), Dept of Water Resources (DWR), CalFed and Army Corps of Engineers ACE). The primary umbrella groups are – Anadromous Fish Restoration Project (AFRP), Four Pumps Team (this has lead the effort on Robinson, Ratzlaff and Western Stone projects), and Calfed.

CDFG – (Tim Heyne) Monitoring of Chinook salmon via carcass surveys and trawl nets. Merced River in 2005 had 2150 chinook salmon in river (most of which is assumed have spawned in river) plus 391 fish brought into the hatchery.

Merced Ag Commissioner – (Dan Cismowski) Water hyacinth management program update– chemical treatment for 2006 is allowed to begin April 15 for off-channel sites and May 15 in the channel, depending on temperature. Treatment must end by Oct 15.

Merced Fly Fishers (Ken Jensen) – Have submitted a proposal to CDFG to re-create a rainbow trout fishery in the Merced River below the Crocker Huffman dam. The proposal requests no funds, just permission.

Chowchilla RCD – (Jeannie Habbin) Arrundo removal is a major focus in this RCD. They are demonstrating a new technique that significantly decreases the amount of time needed to control this invasive weed.

Merced River Ed. Institute – (Nancy McConnell) Due to the death of Audrey Robinson, MREI activities have been on temporary hold.

Buhach Colony High School – (Lee Robinson) Restoration projects and environmental education through the following organizations at the High School; Merced River Watershed Ecological Restoration Club and Environmental Science Academy. Trained student teams may be available for restoration work.

3. MRS Brainstorming/Planning for 2006

The following suggestions were taken from the stakeholders for follow-up during 2006:

Fly Fisher Proposal – A full presentation with time for questions. October was suggested. At that time, we can hear if there is a need for support from MRS. Is there opportunity to work with the EMRCD permit coordination program, particularly for addition of gravel?

Permit Coordination – Send list of proposed practices out to interested stakeholders; Pete Downs, Jill Ratzlaff and Pat Ferrigno.

Stillwater Biological Assessment – A full presentation with time for questions. Maia or Point Reyes Bird Observatory suggested speakers.

ESQV Water Quality Coalition- Coordinate efforts of MRS and the coalition by communicating and sharing information. Share information on the biological assessments and Merced River Ranch progress with coalition.

UC Merced – Invite representatives to engage with the Merced River Stakeholders. Invite representatives to MRS meetings. A presentation on research of the natural resources of the area, particularly water.

In-Channel Restoration – A full report on the progress of achieving the proposed results, impacts to adjacent lands and how evaluation will inform decisions on future projects. Stakeholders would like to discuss content of this presentation beforehand. Suggested speakers – Kevin Faulkenberry, Pat Brantley, Bill Laudermilk, Carl Mesick. Possibly in Aug/Sept to allow time to compile results of 2006 carcass survey.

Vegetation Restoration - Field trip to Ratzlaff property in Spring to view re-vegetation projects.

Public Access – Trespassing.

Easements – Update on conservation easements at confluence. Possible field trip with panel discussion. John Vollmar suggested as panel member. This may stimulate more landowner participation in MRS. Pat Ferrigno has list of Merced River property owners for outreach to this event.

County Planning Department – Full presentation on Lakeview properties proposed subdivision near Henderson Park.

River Fly-Over – Assess need for updated flyover video of the river. Stillwater did flyover for habitat in Fall '05.

Joint Alliance Meetings

The following activities were approved for joint Alliance meetings in 2006:

- Tour of Exchequer Dam
- Float of the Lower Merced River
- Tour of Yosemite

5. Announcements

Cindy Lashbrook announced the upcoming dinner for the Central Valley Farmland Trust. 6PM Saturday, Feb 25 at the Merced County Ag Museum. For more information, call the Merced County Farm Bureau (209) 723-3001.

6. Next Meeting

The next meeting of the MRS will be March 20th, 6:00-8:00PM in Merced. Pat Ferrigno will bring snacks and Cathy Weber will bring coffee.

For more information, contact Gwen Huff at (559) 497-5033 or gwenhuff@comcast.net

MARCH 2006 MINUTES

Merced River Stakeholders Meeting March 20, 2006

These meeting minutes summarize main discussion points that arose during the meeting, as well as any agreements by the group for action. They will be reviewed for approval by the stakeholders at their next regular meeting.

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1. Opening

- Self-introductions
- Review of Ground Rules
- Approved of draft minutes from January 2006 meeting
- Approved agenda for tonight's meeting

2. Update from Merced Irrigation District

Ted Selb was unable to attend and sent a written update (inserted here) and this was reviewed at the meeting.

Written MID update from Ted Selb:

Central Sierra (Merced R.) Watershed Snowpack Stats:

119% of Average for the Date

115% of Average for April 1st (Runoff occurs Apr 1 thru Jul 31)

Snow Depth @ 8,000': 115"

Snow Water Content: 40"

River/Reservoir Stats:

Lake McClure Storage: 673,345 Acre Feet (130% Average)

Today's Inflow: ~1,965 Cubic Feet per Second (CFS)

River Flow below Crocker-Huffman Diversion Dam: ~2,000 CFS

2006 Vernalis Adaptive Management Plan (VAMP):

VAMP flows for the Merced R. have yet to be determined

Will be able to report flows at next MRS meeting in April
Merced R. VAMP releases will start around April 12th and go for 30 days

Stakeholders expressed interest in hearing more regarding potential for flooding given the snow volume and reservoir capacity. Gwen Huff will relay this to Ted Selb for the upcoming meeting.

3. Merced Planning Department – Jeff Wilson

Jeff Wilson provided information on a proposed development in Snelling, followed by discussion with stakeholders.

A proposal has been submitted to the County planning department for a major subdivision in Snelling across from Henderson park. It will be on 49 acres, with 33 proposed single family units on approximately 1 acre apiece.

The proposal is currently in the draft/study phase and has had agency, but no public review at this point..

Environmental issues, specifically, elderberry bushes, wetlands and oak woodlands, caused the development to be moved eastward, away from these concerns.

Water will be provided by on-site wells. Sewer services will be supplied by Snelling public services.

Stormwater management will require a stormwater retention basin to be built.

The area is zoned R-1 – no livestock will be permitted.

Flood concerns – This is still to be reviewed. Not certain if this falls within the FEMA delineated flood plain – but it has been determined that it does not fall within the 100 year flood zone.

An irrigation canal that delivers water to other landowners is on the property. How will this water continue being delivered? Undetermined at this time. But there will be an opportunity for landowners to comment on the project when public comment period begins. Notice of this opportunity will be distributed to the MRS by Gwen Huff with information from Jeff Wilson.

Removal of the dredger tailings before site construction will require a mining permit.

Mercury Concerns – How will possible mercury contamination and mobilization be addressed? For private wells that are proposed for the project, they will draw from a lower aquifer- about 100 ft deep. Other studies by Stillwater and Bernie Wade (Snelling landowner) indicate only background levels of mercury. These studies included samples taken from drilled test holes and testing biota. Any mercury would likely be found in pockets, but studies indicate very low levels in the area.

Proposed Mining Projects – Two applications are being reviewed for mining projects upstream from Henderson Park. No decision has been made at this time.

4. Merced River Biological Assessment – Maia Singer Stillwater Sciences

Ms. Singer gave a presentation on methods to be used for fish and bird surveys on the Merced River. Surveys will begin next month.

Concern was voiced by stakeholders that raptors would not be adequately noted in survey. This gap was noted.

A copy of this presentation can be viewed on the Merced River Stakeholders website.

www.mercedriverstakeholders.org

5. Next Meeting

Gwen Huff will set up next meeting on either April 24 or May 1. Proposed speakers will cover the topic of restoration projects and their impacts and evaluation.

Drinks – Cindy Lashbrook

Snacks – Jean Kiel

ADJOURN

MAY 2006 MINUTES

Merced River Stakeholders Meeting Minutes May 8, 2006

The Merced River Stakeholders meeting was held from 6:00-8:00pm at the Merced County Farm Bureau office in Merced, CA. Approximately 16 stakeholders were in attendance, including representatives from the public, landowners, agencies and others. The Final Meeting Minutes and attendance sheet will be placed on file with the East Merced Resource Conservation District.

Minutes from March Meeting

The following corrections were made:

Section 3 – Planning Dept

Regarding the proposed subdivision in Snelling;

“The proposal is currently in the draft/study phase and has not had agency nor public review” This was changed to

“The proposal is currently in the draft/study phase and has had agency, but not public, review.”

Section 4 – Merced River Biological Assessment

The presenter was listed as “Maia Fleming” this was changed to “Maia Singer”

Minutes from March 2006 approved with corrections.

Merced Irrigation District – Ted Selb

Ted Selb presented information on flood management for the Merced River. The complete presentation is on file with the East Merced Resource Conservation District.

The Army Corps of Engineers Water Control Manual is the guiding document for water management at dams. Except for emergency deviations from these procedures, water managers will be subject to time in jail if the procedures are not followed.

Capacity of the Merced River at Stevinson is 6,000 cfs.

In April of this year (2006) outflow from the dam had to be halted because surface water inflow directly to the river was too high. At Cressey this surface flow was 9,650 cfs, none of which was coming from the dam.

Avenues of Discharge

- Emergency Spillway
- Bypass
- Generator Outflow

By Friday of this week (May 12th) inflows to the New Exchequer Dam are expected to be 10,000 cfs. Peak water storage this year is expected June 26th of this year.

Valley Wide Coordination

Weekly conference calls, with all project operators in the San Joaquin Valley, are held to plan for releases in order not to overwhelm the system.

Merced County Planning Department *Jeff Wilson*

- General Plan - The Merced County Board of Supervisors has contracted to the general plan update. Avenues for public input have not been determined yet.
- Gravel Mining – initial studies have begun for proposed mining projects noted at January and March meetings
- Subdivision – the proposed subdivision in Snelling is still being circulated to agencies for review.

The State of Salmon Fisheries *Pat Brantley CDFG*

Pat Brantley provided an overview of the salmon fishery industry, the relationship to the Merced River and its importance to California. The complete presentation is on file with the EMRCD.

Rainbow Trout Restoration Proposal *Ken Jensen, Merced Fly Fishers*

The Merced Fly Fishers have submitted a proposal to the California Department of Fish and Game to restore a rainbow trout fishery in the Merced River from Crocker-Huffman dam to Highway 59. There was a historical fishery there, but was overfished when the fishing season was extended in 1984. Current regulations only allow catch and release.

The proposal describes;

1. Rescuing juvenile trout that have been stranded in the Crocker Outlet canal diversion and reintroduce them to the Merced River below Crocker-Huffman dam.
2. Introduce rainbow trout and triploid rainbow trout produced by Calaveras Trout Farm to the area.

California Department of Fish and Game has raised the following concerns:

- Water Temperature – the department is concerned that water temperatures at the lower end of this reach sometimes reach above the threshold for rainbow trout.
- Salmon and Steelhead- the department is concerned that a rainbow trout population may jeopardize the salmon and steelhead.

The Fly Fisher included water temperature readings taken along the length of this reach and only the lowest section had temperatures above the threshold for trout. The assumption is that the trout would swim out of this warmer reach and into cooler water.

The Fly Fishers go on to state that historically rainbow trout were in the area and were able to live with salmon with no adverse affects.

Benefits of the proposal include broadening of recreational opportunities, providing economic benefit to local businesses and provide opportunities of cooperative work. Additionally, the Fly Fishers propose to carry this project out, if approved, at no expense to the department.

Announcements

Exchequer Dam Tour to be held June 3rd. No cost to attendees and a special invitation is extended to directors of the Mariposa and East Merced Resource Conservation Districts and all stakeholders of both reaches of the river.

Merced River Float to be held June 18th. Cost is \$30 per person and will begin at 9:30am.

Heartland Festival will be held June 17th and 18th and Cindy Lashbrook's farm in Livingston. More details are available at www.eco-farm.org

Next Meeting

July 24th will be the next stakeholders meeting to be held at the Tri-college center. This meeting will focus on evaluation of large scale restoration projects on the Merced River. Attendees are asked to visit the 59 St. bridge prior to the meeting to get visual overview of Robinson and Western Stone projects.

8:05 Adjourn

JULY 2006 MINUTES

Merced River Stakeholders Meeting Minutes July 17, 2006

The Merced River Stakeholders meeting was held from 6:00-8:30pm at the Merced Tri-College Center Merced, CA. Approximately 26 stakeholders were in attendance, including representatives from the public, landowners, agencies and others. The Final Meeting Minutes and attendance sheet will be placed on file with the East Merced Resource Conservation District.

Minutes from May Meeting

Minutes from May 2006 meeting approved with no corrections.

Merced County Planning Department *Jeff Wilson*

Gravel Mining - Three surface mining projects are under review on the Merced River.

1. **Black Diamond/Hardin #1** – West of Snelling Road. The project will be an average of 15-25 feet below grade and will mine 2.5 million cubic yards of aggregate. This project will require a re-zoning from residential to agricultural.
2. **Bernard Wade** – The project will mine dredger tailings to grade. 2 million cubic yards of aggregate to be removed. A processing facility is proposed for the site as well. Initial study is underway.
3. **Michael Birmingham** – The County is currently reviewing this proposal and work is underway for the initial study. The mine will extract 150, 000 cubic yards of aggregated by removing tailings.

Mr. Wilson will provide a more detailed presentation on these projects at the September stakeholders meeting.

General Plan Update

The general plan update is up and running. More information can be found at the County website, www.co.merced.ca.us/countyweb/

Mr. Bill Nicholson will attend the September stakeholders meeting and provide a full presentation on the process.

River Restoration Panel

Pat Brantley, Cal Dept of Fish and Game/Anadromous Fish Restoration Project

Tim Heyne, Cal Dept of Fish and Game

Fred Jurick, Cal Dept of Fish and Game

Peter Downs, Stillwater Sciences

Carl Mesick, US Fish and Wildlife Service
Kevin Faulkenberry, Department of Water Resources

In 1993 Pete Wilson established fish restoration in California with the “Water Policy Plan”. This plan can be found on the web at www.dfg.ca.gov.nafwb

Federal forces were also at work at this same time developing the Central Valley Project – which includes the federal fish restoration plan

Funding for fish restoration projects comes from;

- Department of Water Resources – Four Pumps Agreement
- Anadromous Fish Restoration Project
- CalFed
- Wildlife Conservation Board

This agreement has funded the Merced River Restoration Plan, and the Ratzlaff, Magneson, Robinson and Western Stone projects, as well as others.

Monitoring Efforts

- Streamflow measurements (MID &DWR)
- Salmon carcass surveys (DFG)
- Temperature monitoring (MID & DFG)
- Smolt survival (MID & DFG)
- Juvenile Production via rotary screw traps (CAMP& MIED & DFG)

Project Specific Monitoring

Geomorphic – (DWR & Stillwater Sciences) monitors streamflow, channel configuration, sediment composition and more.

Biological - Smolt survival, Temperature, Redd (nests) counts and conditions, Juvenile habitat suitability, Benthic macro-invertebrates, Vegetative structure, Other fish species and Bird species.

Note: UCSanta Barbara graduate students are doing PhD work on the Robinson project.

Anadromous Fish Restoration Project (AFRP)

In 1992 AFRP came into existence and the focus is adult salmon and other anadromous fish.

Survival of fish is very dependant upon water flows in the rivers where they spawn. Higher flow equals more fish that will live in the ocean. There is a high mortality rate in

the river. Once in the ocean about half of the adult population is harvested by fishing fleets.

River Comparisons

Tuolumne River salmon numbers are declining, but the cause is unknown

Stanislaus River salmon numbers have seen some improvement, possibly because of river restoration projects

Merced River salmon number declined from 1995-1998, but seem to be improving as a result of restoration projects.

Restoration projects could take up to 10 years to show results.

Future AFRP Plans (10 year outlook)

Merced River Ranch

Snelling Project/Santa Fe Aggregates (tailings removal and channel restoration)

MRSHP – Upper Western Stone

GROUP DISCUSSION

Fred Jurick – Four Pumps agreement is a mitigation fund and, thereby, a “restoration producer”.

Cathy Weber – Are there projects downstream of Hwy 59 bridge?

Kevin Faulkenberry – Robinson is just upstream of the bridge, then Western Stone is just below. Western Stone is just in the planning process. Below Western Stone is the Ratzlaff project

Fred Jurick – Available money was divided up for design phases based on need, willing landowners and available funds.

Carl Estrella – How is the vegetation managed?

Kevin Faulkenberry – 5 year monitoring. Planting done via pole-cuttings, acorns, aerial seeding

Pete Downs – Merced River Ranch looking at bird species in correlation to existing vegetation. 1440 native trees planted for a three year study. Different elevations and watering regimes are being tested.

Ken Jensen – On Robinson reach, there is a minimal number of fish spawning.

Kevin Faulkenberry – Numbers are back up to before the 1997 floods. Spawning was probably more concentrated before the flood and restoration. Now it's more spread out because there are more spawning areas. Gravel – between ½” and 6” was added.

Theorized that smaller gravels are more beneficial to fish.

Lee Robinson – does mixed-size gravel not move so much? Therefore better for fish?

Kevin Faulkenberry – Balance of gravel sizes are used to minimize movement, except for those that fish can move. Salmon clean off the larger rock, lay eggs and then cover the

eggs with smaller rock from upstream. Balancing act between rock sizes that fish prefer and those that won't move.

Don Moore – I'm a landowner just downstream from the Ratzlaff property and we have lost a beautiful oak grove since that project was put in.

Kevin Faulkenberry – There could be other factors at play – there was a change to irrigation in the area. Also – there is a succession to oaks, and when the old ones die and there are no young ones to replace them, the grove dies. There is one oak tree there that did die due to gravel additions.

Pat Brantley – We learned some lessons. New projects are looking closer at ground water levels before starting. We will continue investigating. We come to these meetings to get input from stakeholders.

Cathy Weber – this topic has been brought up over the years. Promises to look into it seem to get pushed into the background.

Aaron Wetzel – I have observed several oaks in the watershed, not near the restoration projects, that are not looking healthy.

Kevin Faulkenberry – Plants will re-sort themselves after a major disturbance. There will be changes after restoration projects. But we have learned that we need to do a better job of keeping appropriate vegetation.

Ken Jensen – Oak woodlands should be saved. Oak woodlands ordinance not in place in Merced County.

Carl Mesick – Smolt mortality – what can be done? Radio transmitter inside 4" fish determined that smolts drawn into historical mining pits were eaten. Overall, about 90% of smolts die before making it to the ocean. They must contend with predators, contaminants, etc.. However, other studies of bass stomachs didn't show many salmon in their guts.

Tim Heyne – On MRSHEP studies of smolt survival, increasing water flows increased survival rate.

Fred Jurick – Passage issues are probably most important – most predators don't like swift flow.

BIOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT Maia Singer, Stillwater Sciences

Complete Power Point presentation attached

3 point counts for breeding birds. In the Upper Reach one site was eliminated because of the rock slide. Another location replaces it just upstream

Fish sampling – flows dropped below 1500 cfs in early July allowing surveys to begin

What's Next?

Fish surveys this summer in the lower and this fall in the upper

Chinese mitten crab surveys

MERCED IRRIGATION DISTRICT Ted Selb, MID

NEXT MEETING

September 18th will be the next MRS meeting and it will go from 6:00-8:30. Presentations will include Merced River Ranch (Peter Downs) Merced County General Plan (Bill Nicholson) and Merced River gravel mining project (Jeff Wilson). Snacks and drinks will be provided by Michael Rood and Nate Rutterbush.

SEPTEMBER 2006 MINUTES

Merced River Stakeholders Meeting Minutes September 20, 2006

The Merced River Stakeholders meeting was held from 6:00-8:30pm at the Merced Tri-College Center Merced, CA. Approximately 26 stakeholders were in attendance, including representatives from the public, landowners, agencies and others. The Final Meeting Minutes and attendance sheet will be placed on file with the East Merced Resource Conservation District.

Minutes from July Meeting

Minutes from September 2006 meeting approved with no corrections.

Updates

No MID Update – however, Cindy Lashbrook announced that MID's Hisham Eltal will speak on a new groundwater study at upcoming water forum October 19th.

Stillwater/Alliance Biological Surveys

Summer lower river surveys are complete

Fall 2006 fish and macro-invertebrate surveys are underway

2006 bird breeding surveys are completed in the Upper reach, but will continue through December in the lower. **Looking for volunteers.**

For more information, attend the Stillwater presentation at the Merced Alliance Dinner November 14th.

Merced River Ranch

Peter Downs, Stillwater Science

Merced River Corridor Restoration Plan Phase 4 – Taking place at the Dredger tailings reach 2003-2006 with the pilot restoration plan taking place on Merced River Ranch.

This planning phase will be complete Jan 2007 – seeking additional for implementation of this plan.

Three Goals of the Restoration Plan

- Conduct reach scale scientific assessments of 7 mile dredger tailings reach (DTR)
- Develop conceptual design for floodplain restoration and gravel augmentation of Merced River Ranch (MRR)

- Complete planning to guide restoration in this reach

For more information on baseline data collection and restoration planning at the Merced River Ranch and the Dredger Tailings Reach, go to the following website:

<http://merced.stillwater>

Pilot Project Goals

- Balance sediment supply and transport
- Restore floodplain functions to improve riparian habitat
- Increase in-channel habitat to improve aquatic habitat for native aquatic species
- Scale low-flow and bankful channel geometry to current flow conditions.

Pilot project plans are to reconfigure the channel, do gravel augmentation, grade the floodplain and conserve vegetation.

Question from Glenn Anderson – Will there be public access for education?

PD – Yes – there are plans for strolling trails, one side to be accessible. CDFG will have management plan and will determine public access.

Cathy Weber – The planning stage is coming to an end?

PD – Yes – looking for funds to do actual restoration project

Merced County Planning Department – Mining Projects

Jeff Wilson

Bernard Wade gave presentation on the planned mining operation for his property.

Focused on the approval process.

Presentation by Jeff Wilson –

- Wade Project – in environmental review process (mining tailings to grade, 2 million tons requested, and proposing on-site processing & washing facility – reclamation to open space grasslands)
- Birmingham Project – in environmental review process (mining tailings to grade, 150,000 cubic yards requested, no on-site processing – reclamation to open space grasslands)
- Schmidt Sand mining project – brought up by Bernie Wade- more details at next meeting
- Black Diamond – public comment period ended Aug 12. Will go to planning commission beginning of November. Still has to go before Board of Supervisors for general plan amendment and zone change from residential to agricultural. (proposing to remove 2.5 million cubic yards over 15 year period, will mine below grade)
- Santa Fe Snelling Tailings- submitted new application, south of the community of Snelling, to remove tailings, still under preliminary review. More detail to come at next meeting.

Merced County Planning Department - General Planning Process

Bill Nicholson

Last general plan update 1989-1990

The county general plan will focus on;

- rural and urban interface,
- transportation,
- natural resources,
- public facilities and services

Currently the background report is being prepared which will detail current conditions in the County. This will help set goals and policies. Community input is being solicited through area meetings. The first of three rounds of community meetings have already been held, seeking information on likes and dislikes within the community for the background report. Two additional rounds of community meetings will be held at future stages in the planning process. The first round of community meetings were held in 10 areas, the next two rounds will be held in an additional five areas, bringing the total for the remaining two rounds to 15 each.

Six focus groups are being created to provide input on topic areas for the general plan process:

- agriculture,
- water,
- public services,
- economic development,
- circulation,
- natural resources & habit.

The County is making an effort to coordinate with the “blueprint” planning process done by MCAG – this seeks to plan for larger land use issues within the eight county area in San Joaquin Valley. Especially looking at transportation in blueprint.

Merced County website has page for general plan update – www.co.merced.ca.us

Glenn Anderson – Is there any planning around food production?

BN – it branches off of agriculture planning

Glenn – potential food insecurity – time might be right to include this

Question from the floor - Doesn't Williamson Act supersede the general plan?

Bill – If you're under Williamson Act contract, you cannot urbanize.

Announcements

Merced River Alliance Second Annual Dinner November 14th, announced by Nancy McConnell

Water Monitoring Day Sept 23 in the Upper Watershed

Day in the Upper Watershed Sept 30 with nature walks, fly fishing, song writing and more

Water Forum October 19th

Next Meeting

November 20th

NOVEMBER 2006 MINUTES

Merced River Stakeholders Meeting Minutes November 20, 2006

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Updates

Merced Irrigation District

- MID successfully completed a water transfer of 12,500 Acre Feet to the U. S. Bureau of Reclamation during the month of October, as a part of the San Joaquin River Agreement, which provided attraction flows in the Merced River for migrating adult Fall Run Chinook Salmon. Similar coordinated pulse flow releases were made on the Tuolumne and Stanislaus Rivers.
- Current release below Crocker Huffman Diversion Dam is approximately 300 CFS, representing minimum flow requirements.
- Adult Fall Run Chinook Salmon spawning on the Merced River is currently in progress. The Fish and Game (CDFG) Hatchery is in full swing and CDFG is cataloguing fish/carcass counts, redds, egg takes at the hatchery, etc.
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Merced County Planning Department *Jeff Wilson*

- Harden #1/Black Diamond – Proposal went before planning department Nov 1 – unanimous recommendation to approve zone amendment. Board of Supervisors will vote Dec 12th.
- B Wade – Environmental impact studies being done. Changed processing facility to dry processing – no expected impact on area hydrology. Expect this project to have public review first of next year.
- Santa Fe/Snelling – Mining tailings to grade. Still setting up contracts for environmental review. *Stakeholders request longer review of this project at next MRS meeting.*
- Birmingham – Working through environmental review. Small project – mining tailings to grade.

- Schmitt Ranch – Land leveling to remove 1.5 million cubic yards of sand. Entire project will cover 13 acres, to be done in phases. First phase 29 acres.

Stillwater Sciences Biological Assessment *Maia Singer*

(The entire power point presentation may be found on line at www.emrcd.org)

Fish sampling completed for summer of 2006, Fall study still remains to be analyzed.

Bird sampling completed for spring and summer of 2006.

High water flows required fish surveying methods to include more e-fishing than initially planned.

The diversity of fish species was found to be the greatest in the gravel mining 1 and 2 and encroached reaches.

The diversity and abundance of bird species was found to be greater in the lower reach of the river than in the upper.

PRBO (Point Reyes Bird Observatory) looking for volunteers for bird surveys. They will possibly set up a training for willing volunteers.

Merced River Salmon Tim Heyne, Department of Fish and Game

A film on the Chinook salmon life cycle was shown to meeting attendees.

Chinook salmon can be found in the Merced River right now. They can be viewed on the trail that begins at the upstream end of Henderson park. There are no other viewing sites on public land, however, CDFG plans to use the Merced River Ranch as a location for increased public access and opportunity to view salmon.

This is a very low year for salmon. The population varies in a cycle that tracks the amount of water seen in the river, ie, a high water year will cause a fish population spike a couple of years later.

Chinook salmon spawning season is October to January. For building nests, known as redds, the salmon require a specific combination of gravel sizes for water to flow through the nest. Sand and other fine sediments are detrimental because they block this flow of water.

CDFG is currently conducting carcass surveys wherein weekly counts are made of adult salmon in the river.

The Crocker-Huffman hatchery is very small compared to other hatcheries. It produces perhaps ½ million eggs per year, whereas other hatcheries will produce 10 million eggs. Regarding the proposed closure of the hatchery, MID has agreed to supplement the operating costs and it will remain open.

Friant Water Agreement *Mario Santoya, Kole Upton, Friant Water Users Authority*

A settlement has been reached on restoring flows to the San Joaquin River from Friant dam after an eighteen year legal dispute. This settlement was in response to a suit from environmental groups because the fishery below Friant Dam was no longer viable due to decreased flows. The settlement agreement is based on two goals:

1. A restored river with continuous flows to the Delta an naturally reproducing populations of Chinook salmon.
2. A water management program to minimize water supply impacts to San Joaquin River water users.

There has also been an agreement with Merced Irrigation District not to have an adverse affect on the Merced River and its fisheries. High temperatures from the San Joaquin could possibly be toxic to the Merced Fall run of Chinook. Agreement ensures this will not affect Merced fish.

The agreement gives a preference to restoring the Spring run Chinook salmon, but also includes Fall run. The Spring run will be designated as “experimental” so that northern tributaries (including the Merced River) will not be obligated to manage for this new run, should it enter the Merced.

Full restoration flows are scheduled to begin in 2014 and will be based on water year types.

Water supply is expected to be reduced to users by 15-20%. To offset this water loss, once water leaves the San Joaquin system and enters the Delta, the excess will be pumped out and returned to the Friant Canal. There are numerous places in the river channel that will need work to accommodate the increased flows.

More information can be found on the internet at

<http://clients.bbklaw.net/Friant/HTML/ClientMatters/PublicDocs/SettlementAgreementPowerPointPresentationFinal.pdf>

Next Meeting

January 15th, 2007