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Merced River Stakeholders Meeting Minutes March 19, 2007

The Merced River Stakeholders meeting was held from 6:00-8:30pm at the Merced County Farm Bureau Office, Merced, CA. Approximately 21 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 January Meeting

Minutes from January 2007 meeting approved.

Updates

Merced Irrigation District (*Ted Selb*)

Extremely dry conditions. Fourth driest January on record. 200 – 300 Acre Feet for this year, which will be 30%-50% of average.

VAMP – Lack of salmon eggs and fish for 2007 because of poor rate of returning adults in 2006 and resulting low egg gathering. Water is still being released in accordance with the VAMP plan.

Some salmon will be tracked via GPS transmitters all the way to the ocean – this system was used in a pilot study in 2006. 300,000 “taggable” fish in the Merced hatchery which will all be tagged with wire tags, not GPS. Pulse flows late April-early May of 1000 cfs (cubic feet per second) unless there is more rain before then, then it could be up to 3000 cfs.

Merced Groundwater Study - \$5 million study to be initiated by MAGPI (Merced Area Groundwater Pool Interests). Merced County and MID committing \$2million for local share with match from DWR (Dept of Water Resources). Now seeking federal funds for 2008.

Petition of temporary water transfers for 2007 only. Petition to CAD, who are not entitled to stored water, river water only. Up to 250,000 acre feet (AF) will be able to be released to CAD. Will file for permanent transfer for 2008 to ultimately have permanent supply to CAD from stored water. (This petition is on file with EMRCD records.)

Fish Traps – Fish trapping results are on the MID website from previous years. This year CDFG permits could not be acquired because of lack of qualified personnel. Mid February traps were pulled. Hope to trap in Dec 2007. Not an ideal situation because we can not compare trapping data from upper and lower (Fish Sciences) traps.

Merced County Planning Department (*Jeff Wilson*)

Of all the below mining projects, only one will require an EIR – Santa Fe.

- Santa Fe – South of Snelling, in early stages, working on agreements to conduct environmental review.
- Wade – Final review. Change from wet to dry processing. Should be out for public review by next meeting (mid-late summer)
- Birmingham – Still waiting for environmental review consultant.
- Schmitt – Just beginning environmental review process

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- Black Diamond – Approved, but there are legal action which County is working on resolving. However, excavators have already gone below grade.

Endangered Species Overview (Gwen Huff, EMRCD)

Power point presentation given on endangered species of Eastern Merced County. This presentation will be posted to the EMRCD website.

Comments:

Some agencies with oversight were not included; Department of Water Resources, Army Corps of Engineers, Regional Water Quality Control Board.

Vernal pools of East Merced are being lost to deep ripping as a result of conversion from range land to irrigated crop land. Having a “grading permit” process in place would be helpful in stopping this.

EMRCD Grant Proposal to CalFed (Gwen Huff, EMRCD)

EMRCD submitted a concept proposal to CalFed that would develop a Lower Merced River Watershed Plan. The proposal was presented to the Merced River Stakeholders in order to further develop the idea in case we are able to submit a full proposal.

Comments:

- Add Upland Habitat to workgroup list
- Concerned about how this would affect the Merced River Corridor Restoration Plan. *It was explained that the MRCRP and this watershed plan have different focuses, but the watershed plan would incorporate all the information and recommendations from the MRCRP.*
- Are there any on-the-ground project associated with the watershed plan? *No, this would be for developing the plan and identifying projects only. However, we have also included writing of concept proposals for identified projects. Also, any projects that are the result of such a planning process have a greater probability of getting funded.*
- How will this affect the Merced River Stakeholders meetings? *Discussion resulted in decision to keep MRS meetings going, though probably drop to once a quarter. These meetings could serve to inform all stakeholders on the results of the working groups and provide input to the process.*
- Need for increased coordination in the watershed. Some landowners are going to several different meetings, all within the watershed, where the different entities are unfamiliar with the other meetings. *This lack of coordination is cause for concern and the group hopes that this grant will be able to address this concern.*
- Technical Advisory Committee – this method was tried before, but was unsuccessful because it was perceived as keeping stakeholders out of the process. *EMRCD is attempting, this time, to steer away from the TAC method and include stakeholders in all aspects. This will be accomplished by having an interactive website for each topic group and for the logistical planning of the process. Also, all stakeholders will be invited to participate in as many work groups as they would like.*
- For the Species workgroup, be sure to invite USFWS to attend. *They have already committed to it.*
- List of work groups needs modification.

If this concept proposal is invited for a full proposal, all stakeholders at today's meeting will be contacted by Gwen Huff for their input on the proposal and the proposal will be a major agenda item for the May MRS meeting.

Announcements

Exploratory drilling for natural gas is being proposed for land near the Merced River. Landowner Mary Cardoza was approached by drilling company and is concerned about environmental impacts. She requests other interested parties to attend meeting of the planning department that will address this project.

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Heartland Festival and Merced River Fair is happening June 2nd at Cindy Lashbrook's farm. Contact Cindy for more information (209) 761-0081.

Landowner Workshop will take place in Livingston on March 29th. Contact Cindy Lashbrook for more information (209) 761-0081.

Next Meeting

The next MRS meeting will take place on Monday, May 21st. David Hu will bring snacks and Granite Construction will bring drinks.