

MID says it's close to having more water storage in Merced County dam

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Merced County area officials cleared a hurdle on Wednesday when the US Senate approved a plan officials hope could eventually result in more water storage at Lake McClure.

The Water Resources Development Act/America's Water Infrastructure Act, which already passed the House, cleared the Senate with a 99-1 vote, officials said. The legislation could be signed into law in the coming days by President Donald Trump.



Rep. Jim Costa, D-Fresno, speaks Tuesday, Oct. 16, 2018, at a press conference related to his legislation, the Water Resources Development Act/America's Water Infrastructure Act. Submitted Photo

The legislation includes a provision allowing the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to accept non-federal funding for the review and update of operating manuals for locally-owned reservoirs. The new legislation allows owners of non-federal dams to give that funding to the Corps, which was previously not allowed.

The proposed law would mark a significant step forward to store up to an additional 57,000-acre feet of water in Lake McClure at the end of the irrigation season, according to [Merced Irrigation District](#) Board President Dave Long.

The [legislation was introduced](#) by Rep Jim Costa, D-Fresno, and co-authored by Rep. Jeff Denham, R-Turlock.

“This legislation creates a pathway for the first new surface water storage in the Valley in decades,” Costa has said. “This is a victory for Merced County and the people of the Valley.”

The operations manual for Lake McClure has not been significantly updated for more than 30 years, according to MID. Modernization of the Lake McClure manual is critical, officials say.

“We have worked diligently on this for many years, and we are grateful to members of our congressional delegation for their ongoing support of our efforts,” MID General Manager John Sweigard said.



Bipartisan legislation intended to support the Lake McClure Storage Enhancement Project has passed the U.S. House of Representatives, Merced Irrigation District officials said Thursday. Andrew Kuhn akuhn@mercedsunstar.com

The expansion project would allow the additional 57,000-acre-feet of carryover water storage in the 1-million-acre-foot reservoir, officials said. Irrigation water is measured per acre-foot, which is the amount of water it takes to cover an acre of land a foot deep, or about 325,900 gallons.

Lake McClure provides water supplies to San Joaquin Central Valley farmers, the environment, recreation areas and the replenishment of groundwater for urban use, including drinking water.

MID also announced on Wednesday it was awarded a \$1 million grant to help offset costs for a new regulating water basin in Merced County.

The basin will span about 40 acres located five miles south of Atwater adjacent to Bear Creek, MID said in a news release.

The basin is expected to help conserve about 5,300-acre feet of stored water each year, the release said. MID operates several other similar water-regulating basins as part of its water delivery system in eastern Merced County.

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