



McClintock seeks to have Merced River taken off scenic list

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STOCKTON - Rep. Tom McClintock, R-Granite Bay, this week introduced a bill, HR934, that would remove the wild and scenic designation from a small section of the Merced River in order to allow an expansion of the storage capacity of Lake McClure.

The move is controversial because environmentalists believe it would set a precedent for reversing the protections granted to some waterways under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, which President Lyndon Johnson signed in 1968.

McClintock, in a written statement, said that removing 1,800 feet of the Merced from protected status would allow construction of a higher dam that would raise the level of Lake McClure by 10 feet and allow the Merced Irrigation District to store an extra 70,000 acre-feet of water a year.

"At a time when California is suffering increasingly scarce water supplies and paying among the highest electricity prices in the nation, this legislation will allow for both increased water storage and additional hydropower generation," McClintock said.

The proposed legislation is similar to a bill that Rep. Jeff Denham, R-Turlock, carried unsuccessfully last year.

McClintock represents the 4th Congressional District, which includes Calaveras, Tuolumne and Mariposa counties. McClintock co-authored the latest Merced River bill with Rep. Jim Costa, D-Fresno.

River advocates promised to fight the proposed adjustment to the Merced's wild and scenic boundary.

"We've never de-designated a wild and scenic river to convert it in to a reservoir in the history of the system," Ronald Stork, a policy analyst for Friends of the River, wrote in an email. "We certainly hope that the bill fails again. Americans don't vandalize our National Wild & Scenic River System any more than we vandalize our National Park System."

The Merced, which is popular with rafters and other recreationists, flows out of Yosemite National Park.

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