

**NOTICE OF PUBLIC AVAILABILITY
FOR THE REVIEW OF THE
DRAFT INITIAL STUDY/MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION FOR THE PROPOSED
MERCED IRRIGATION DISTRICT'S MERCED RIVER AGRICULTURAL DIVERSION
AND FISH HABITAT ENHANCEMENT PROJECT**

Merced Irrigation District, as the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) lead agency, announces the availability of the Draft Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND) for the proposed Merced River Agricultural Diversion and Fish Habitat Enhancement Project (project). This notice is provided pursuant to noticing requirements found in Public Resources Code Sec. 21092 and the State CEQA Guidelines (Guidelines Sec. 15807).

PROJECT LOCATION: The Cowell 1 diversion is approximately 1 mile downstream of Snelling Road Bridge and 2.2 miles southwest of Snelling, California. The Cowell 2 diversion is located about 2.9 miles west of State Route 59 bridge. The Merced River lies within United States Geologic Survey (USGS) hydrologic unit 18040002. The diversions occur approximately 51 river miles (RM) upstream from the confluence with the San Joaquin River, between 37.463112 N, -120.552661 W (downstream limit) and 37.496382 N, -120.466602 W (upstream limit). Cuneo and Cowell 1 are both located within the "Snelling, CA" U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) 7.5-minute topographic quadrangle (quad), in Sections 17, 18, 3 and 10 in Township 5 South, Range 14 East. Cowell 2 is located in Sections 28 and 29 in Township 5 South, Range 13 East in the "Winton, CA" quad.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: The overall vision of the Merced River Agricultural Diversion and Fish Habitat Enhancement Project (Proposed Project) is to reduce negative effects of agricultural diversions on salmonids by increasing quantity and quality of spawning, incubation, and rearing habitat, increasing salmonid survival, and reducing or eliminating salmonid entrainment/impingement/predation while increasing water diversion efficiency and reliability within the Lower Merced River (LMR). The Proposed Project aims to enhance up to three Cowell Agreement surface water diversions on the LMR (Figure 1) and to address issues presented by diversions along the LMR with long-standing water rights, including improperly functioning fish screens, poor diversion siting, and diversion configurations which are not engineered or designed to meet fish and diverter needs. Design and construction will occur in two phases, targeting the Cowell 2 diversion in the first year and the Cowell 1 and Cuneo diversions in the second.

PROJECT IMPACTS: The project would not have any significant impacts on the environment after mitigation measures are implemented. The project would enhance salmonid spawning and rearing habitat on the Merced River and improve diversion efficiency and reliability.

PUBLIC REVIEW PERIOD: The Draft IS/MND will be available for a 30-day public review period from January 31, 2022, to March 1, 2022. Written comments on the Draft IS/MND should be addressed to Merced Irrigation District, Attn: Mike Morris, P.O. Box 2288, Merced, CA 95344. Comments must be received in writing at the above address no later than March 1, 2022. Comments received will be addressed, and the responses to comments will be included as part of the record.

A copy of the Draft IS/MND is available for review at the following location:

Merced Irrigation District
744 W. 20th Street
Merced, CA 95340

After comments have been received on the Draft IS/MND, a public hearing will be scheduled for a regular meeting of the Merced Irrigation District Board of Directors, in the City of Merced, City Council Chambers, 678 W. 18th Street, Merced, California.