

Bad news on the Merced River: Newly elected Congressman Jeff Denham (R-Modesto) introduced a bill (HR 869) to roll back Wild and Scenic river protection for the Merced River to accommodate the Merced Irrigation District's proposed expansion of Lake McClure Reservoir. The cosponsors are San Joaquin Valley Democrat Representatives Dennis Cardoza and Jim Costa.

If successful, this would represent the first time that the Congress eliminated protection for a portion of the protected National Wild and Scenic River system in the face of a dam threat — the very protection the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System was designed to provide. Introduction and passage of such legislation would represent a major precedential step to undermine the integrity of the National Wild and Scenic River System.

An unlikely candidate for raising (Exchequer Dam is more than oversized since it has never spilled in its history), the District has, nevertheless, been working the Congress for several years to reverse protection for a river widely known in the country as Yosemite 's river. Newsclip on Rep Denham wild and scenic river rollback legislation.

<http://goldrushcam.com/sierrasuntimes/news/mariposa-daily-news-2011/104/1942-representative-denham-introduces-bill-to-increase-water-storage-in-san-joaquin-valley>

Dennis Cardoza's press release:

<http://cardoza.house.gov/index.cfm?sectionid=87&sectiontree=6,87&itemid=743>

According to these press accounts, the bill would allow a 10 foot dam raise, all of it encroaching on the currently protected end of the designated Merced wild and scenic river (although this, of course, is not really mentioned). Using standard rules of thumb for storage to yield ratios, actual new system average yield from the project might be around 10,000 acre feet per year. The District's dams on the Meced result in deliveries of roughly half a million acre feet per year, a rather small gain.

Will keep you informed on where this goes.

--Cindy Charles