



State Water Project Briefing: Delta Restoration

Introduction

The Department of Water Resources (DWR) and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) coordinate operations of the State Water Project (SWP) and the Central Valley Project (CVP) to comply with the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). In addition, DWR's operations of the SWP must comply with the California Endangered Species Act (CESA). On October 21, 2019, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) issued new biological opinions for the long-term operation of the CVP and SWP. These new biological opinions replace the previous opinions issued by NMFS and USFWS. On March 31, 2020, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) issued an Incidental Take Permit (ITP) to DWR for the long-term operations of the SWP in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. In compliance with these biological opinions and the ITP, DWR is undertaking restoration efforts to mitigate the effects of the long-term operations of the SWP on numerous federal and state protected fish species.

Tidal Restoration

DWR has been working for about 10 years to complete restoration of more than 8,000 acres of intertidal and associated subtidal habitat in the Delta and Suisun marshes to improve habitat conditions for Delta smelt and longfin smelt by enhancing food production and availability. DWR is pursuing implementation of this action through the Fish Restoration Program in conjunction with CDFW. These projects are also expected to provide floodplain habitat for protected salmon species. DWR expects to have completed construction on six projects by the end of 2020 and anticipates completing all required restoration acres by 2024.

Floodplain Access and Fish Passage Improvements

DWR, in partnership with BOR, has made substantial progress on implementing various floodplain access and passage infrastructure projects within the Yolo Bypass to benefit several anadromous fish species: Sacramento River winter-run Chinook salmon, Central Valley spring-run Chinook salmon, California Central Valley steelhead, and Southern Distinct Population Segment North American green sturgeon. DWR and BOR are currently working on designing and permitting the Yolo Bypass Salmonid Habitat Restoration and Fish Passage Project. In addition, DWR and BOR have completed several other projects to benefit fish passage in the Yolo Bypass including the Wallace Weir Fish Rescue Facility and the Fremont Weir Adult Fish Passage Modification Project.

Background

The California State Water Project (SWP), consisting of 36 water storage facilities and 700 miles of rivers, pipelines and canals, supplies water to 27 million people and irrigates 750,000 acres of farmland. The system includes 21 pumping plants, powered by a system of power-generation and power-recovery plants. The Department of Water Resources (DWR) also operates the world's tallest water lift – the Edmonston Pumping Plant – which pumps water more than 1,900 feet up and over the Tehachapi Mountains into Southern California.

Goal Two of the Commission's Strategic Plan directs the Commission to remain apprised of the operations and construction activities of the State Water Project, focusing on how the SWP adapts and responds to hydrological extremes expected with climate change, restores critical ecosystems, and addresses aging infrastructure. As required by Water Code section 165, the Commission conducts an annual review on the progress of the construction and operation of the SWP and reports its findings and recommendations to the Department and the Legislature. This presentation will inform the Commission of SWP construction activities over the past year, in preparation for the Commission's 2020 annual review.

Meeting Overview

At the October meeting, Catherine McCalvin, Chief of DWR's Office of Environmental Compliance, will describe the status of these projects and others that are underway to restore habitat for listed species in association with the SWP.

This is an information item.

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