



Consideration of Action on Resolution of Necessity for the Yolo Bypass Salmonid Habitat Restoration and Fish Passage Project (Big Notch Project) (Action Item)

Introduction

The Yolo Bypass Salmonid Habitat Restoration and Fish Passage Project (Big Notch Project or Project) is being advanced by the Department of Water Resources (Department) and will improve fish passage and increase floodplain fisheries habitat in the Yolo Bypass and the lower Sacramento River basin. The Project entails constructing a gated notch in the Fremont Weir and increasing the flooding in a portion of the Yolo Bypass when water surface elevations in the Sacramento River are amenable to fish passage. This will allow juvenile salmon to move from the Sacramento River onto the floodplain and adult salmon and sturgeon access into the Sacramento River from the Yolo Bypass. The Project is required by the 2019 National Marine Fisheries Service Biological Opinion (NMFS BO) and the 2020 California Department of Fish and Wildlife Incidental Take Permit for the continued long-term operations of the State Water Project.

Because the Project involves increasing the seasonal flooding of private land, the Department has initiated negotiations pursuant to the State's eminent domain authority. Code of Civil Procedure section 1245.210(h) requires the Department to acquire a Resolution of Necessity (RON) from the California Water Commission. The Commission received a briefing about the Commission's Resolution of Necessity Process in June 2021 and a briefing about the legal considerations for a Resolution of Necessity in January 2022. Negotiations have not produced an agreement for the flood easement with the landowner, therefore the Department is requesting the Commission consider adopting a Resolution of Necessity for the landholding noted on the agenda.

The Department will present evidence for the Commission to consider in support of the specific findings required for a resolution of necessity pursuant to Code of Civil Procedure § 1245.230, which requires the Commission to find:

1. The public interest and necessity require the proposed project.
2. The proposed project is planned or located in the manner that will be most compatible with the greatest public good and the least private injury.
3. The property described in the resolution is necessary for the proposed project.

4. That either the offer required by Section 7267.2 of the Government Code has been made to the owner or owners of record, or the offer has not been made because the owner cannot be located with reasonable diligence.

DWR has determined that the Project is a compatible use with the existing public use, which allows for the Property to be flooded. Operation of this Project would not unreasonably interfere with or impair the continuance of the public use as it exists or may reasonably be expected to exist in the future (CCP § 1240.510).

The landowner has been notified of this hearing and their right to attend and be heard or to submit written comments.

Background

California Water Code sections 250, 253, 258, 11575 and 11580 allow the Department to acquire land to construct, maintain, or operate the State Water Project. California Code of Civil Procedure sections 1245.210 and 1245.220 require the Department to obtain a Resolution of Necessity from the California Water Commission (Commission) before proceeding to initiate court action to obtain property rights from private citizens.

On January 8, 2024, the Commission received a request from the Department to begin the process of obtaining a RON, pursuant to the Commission's procedures. The Commission notified the affected landowner listed in the agenda of this hearing on the Resolution of Necessity. The notice was mailed on January 30, 2024, from the Commission's office at 715 P Street, Sacramento, California.

This agenda item is consistent with Goal Three of the Commission's Strategic Plan, to carry out its "statutory authorities associated with the Department ... to ensure that the Department's decisions on key programs and activities are based on sound information and advance climate resiliency." Goal Three specifically includes the Commission's eminent domain obligations within its objectives.

Meeting Overview

At this meeting, Liz Vasquez and Rachel Taylor, from the Department of Water Resources, will present evidence to the Commission regarding the specific property listed on the agenda and how that property is necessary to meet the goals of the Big Notch project. Ms. Vasquez and Ms. Taylor will also update the Commission about the efforts the Department has made to work with the landowner. The Department will ask the Commission to consider adopting a Resolution of Necessity for the landowner and property listed on the agenda.

This is an action item.

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