



Update on Department of Fish and Wildlife by Director Chuck Bonham

Background

California's fish and wildlife populations have experienced a wide array of impacts from the ongoing drought. Chuck Bonham, Director of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), will discuss the actions CDFW has taken to respond to the drought this year, and the department's plans for 2015 if drought conditions persist. Some of the department's key drought-related actions are identified on its website (<https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/drought>) and listed below:

Fisheries

CDFW has deployed staff to rescue threatened and endangered fish species on many rivers across the state. Staff also evacuated the American River and Nimbus hatcheries due to low flows making the water temperatures reach heights unsustainable for the fish there. We are actively monitoring conditions in waters around the state, including for steelhead and high country golden trout streams. We anticipate actions like these to continue as drought conditions persist.

Wildlife

Increased wildlife/human interaction has been reported and that may be due to drought conditions forcing wild animals to search farther than normal for food. Black bear and mountain lion are considered the species of greatest concern for human interaction. CDFW is assessing its response resources (culvert traps for bears and darting equipment) throughout the state to better distribute these resources for timely response to incidents.

Marijuana

CDFW is heavily involved in operations to rid our state of illegal marijuana grows. The Governor's 2014-15 budget bill provided an increase of \$1.5 million to regulate and enforce unauthorized water diversions and pollution to surface and groundwater as a result of marijuana cultivation. Marijuana plants use six to eight gallons of water per plant, per day, and are a direct hazard to wildlife that eats the plants. Even growers who have been authorized to cultivate marijuana in the state are often unaware of the need to get a permit from CDFW for diverting water from a stream.

Protecting our water resources

CDFW is taking great strides to keep as much water as possible in the rivers for fish and wildlife that depend on it. To that end, CDFW has introduced a voluntary drought initiative providing a framework for water users to enter into individual agreements with CDFW and NOAA Fisheries in an effort to maintain enough water for fish spawning in specific high priority streams, and implement other collaborative actions like fish rescue, relocation, monitoring and habitat restoration. In return, landowners and water users will benefit from greater regulatory certainty under the federal and state endangered species laws, and may receive incidental take authorizations for California Endangered Species Act (CESA)-listed fish in case a participant unintentionally takes listed fish species while withdrawing water. Also, in March 2014, CDFW expedited approval for the installation of storage tanks by landowners who currently divert water from rivers and streams

Maximizing efficient use of water on CDFW lands

Based on the anticipated needs of migrating birds and other threatened and endangered wetland species throughout the state, CDFW is planning how best to allocate available surface and ground water, fully recognizing that domestic needs for water will take precedence if so determined. Any water that is available for wildlife habitat work will be distributed and used to benefit threatened/endangered species and maintenance of critical wetland habitats for vulnerable wetland-dependent species in the most efficient manner possible. Planning for this involves consideration of anticipated water availability for wildlife on all public and private lands and coordination with other agencies and stakeholders.

Water operations

CDFW, USFWS and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) have collectively worked to ensure that water management decisions do not unreasonably affect threatened and endangered species. CDFW, in partnership with its federal agency counterparts, immediately began to increase monitoring of fish in the Sacramento River to better understand the drought's impact on threatened species. This monitoring assesses spawning, rearing and stranding conditions, and it will closely track temperature conditions in the Sacramento River and its tributaries and the health of the winter run Chinook salmon species. DFW will also implement monitoring actions detailed in the Drought Operations Plan for Delta and long-fin smelt, green sturgeon and salmon and steelhead. Later this year, CDFW plans to work with NMFS and USFWS to complete restoration and fish passage projects for the benefit of several runs of salmon in the Upper Sacramento River and its tributaries.

Funding for drought response actions

As part of the state's comprehensive drought response, CDFW has been funded to act on a wide variety of critical drought related fronts, including:

- Habitat restoration in key areas of the Delta to support declining fish populations
- Increased and enhanced monitoring of Central Valley salmon populations to inform targeted drought response actions
- Additional habitat restoration and infrastructure improvements to support the San Joaquin River restoration program
- Water conveyance and infrastructure improvements focusing on water efficiency on many of the state's wildlife areas and ecological reserves
- State-of-the-art monitoring of Delta fisheries to support real-time water management decisions
- Infrastructure at many fish hatcheries to support short- and mid-term hatchery-based management fish removed from streams impacted by the drought
- Additional targeted funding under the Fisheries Restoration Grant Program to deliver resources to partners poised to improve habitat in key spawning and cover areas
- Increased funding for law enforcement to promote compliance with fish and wildlife protection laws in the context of drought stress to many fish and wildlife populations

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