

California Department of Water Resources NEWS

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CONTACTS:

- [Dan Peterson \(DWR\)](#) -- [w] (916) 653-9978
 - [Pete Weisser \(DWR\)](#) -- [w] (916) 653-9712
 - Dave Spath (DHS) -- [w] (916) 322-2308
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Delta Water Quality Update

SACRAMENTO - As California copes with its largest flood event in a decade, the quality of drinking water supplies from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta continues to be high, according to state water and health officials.

Recent California floods have freshened Delta waters. Extremely high Sacramento and San Joaquin River flows, concurrent with the flooding, are pushing fresh water through the Delta and into San Pablo Bay. The Delta Outflow Index, a measure of fresh water discharged to San Pablo Bay, exceeded 500,000 cubic feet per second during New Years week and is now 360,000 cfs (Jan 8). These values are about 10 times early December 1996 outflow. Salinity measurements at the state and federal pumping facilities are running about 60 percent lower than before the floods. This trend is expected to continue.

Should a levee fail, flooding a Delta Island, the current fresh water outflow would continue to keep salt water intrusion to a minimum. Freshwater would continue to be available at the state and federal pumps.

Salinity intrusion into drinking water supplies from the Delta is not a problem, according to David Spath, chief of the Drinking Water Program for the State Department of Health Services. Spath said the huge storm runoff of fresh water through the Delta makes salinity intrusion impossible. "From the salinity standpoint, we view it as a non-issue," said Spath. "We're not looking at this as a water treatment problem."

Spath indicated that California's water systems are equipped with "more than adequate treatment" capability to assure safe, high quality drinking water. Local health officers in the flood areas are taking steps to assure disinfection and safety of local water sources and supplies affected by inundation, Spath said.

The Department of Water Resources provides water supplies to millions of Californians from the Delta through the State Water Project and its 29 long-term contractors. Once treated, SWP water meets stringent drinking water quality standards of both the US Environmental Protection Agency and the State Department of Health Services. DWR routinely conducts extensive monitoring for water quality in the Delta and of water in the SWP system. During the flood, additional Delta and State Water Project water quality monitoring is occurring. The State Water Project is under routine operation for a flood event.

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The Department of Water Resources operates and maintains the State Water Project, provides dam safety and flood control and inspection services, assists local water districts in water management and water conservation planning, and plans for future statewide water needs. The State Water Project provides water to two-thirds of California's population.

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