

California
Department of Water Resources

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Anti-Crab Structures Are Ready At Delta Pumps

TRACY---State and federal water project managers today reported that devices built to deter Chinese mitten crabs from interfering with Delta pumping and fish salvage operations are installed and ready.

“This non-native species, which has invaded the Bay-Delta Estuary in large numbers in recent years, poses a threat to State and federal efforts to protect our native threatened fishery species and meet our water supply commitments,” said Steve Macaulay, Acting Chief Deputy Director of the Department of Water Resources.

“A specially designed screen is in place at the Central Valley Project Fish Collection Facility near Tracy and we are prepared for the crabs migration,” said Jeff McCracken of the Bureau of Reclamation.

Both the Federal Central Valley Project (CVP) pumping plant near Tracy and the State Water Project (SWP) pumping plant near Byron may adapt their pumping schedules to minimize attraction of crabs.

Near the SWP plant, an underwater barrier resembling a highway divider was installed at an angle to the flow to help guide the crabs crawling along the bottom into collection traps. The barrier and collection area is located just upstream of the Skinner Fish Facility and two miles upstream from the SWP’s Banks Pumping Plant.

Reclamation has developed and performed nine months of testing on a traveling water screen to be used at the Tracy facility. The 28-foot-high, 17,000-pound screen is designed to assure an optimum survival of fish by effectively separating crabs from fish. It is expected to be in operation within the next few days. Last year, the Bureau collected about 1 million crabs, weighing a total of almost 250,000 pounds.

Due in part to its closer proximity to crab migration routes, the CVP plant in 1998 attracted far more crabs than the SWP plant (at peak periods, about 25,000 per day at the CVP, compared to 10,000 per day at the SWP facility). A similar pattern is expected this year.

The seasonal surge of Chinese mitten crabs from fresh to salt water for spawning is expected to bring them near the federal and State pumping plants in the South Delta by early fall.

During most of their life cycles, the crabs pose no threat to Delta exports by the two major water systems. They live most of their adult lives in the fresh water of rivers and the upper Delta, moving to salty Bay waters to spawn. Only during the few months of their spawning migration do they pose a threat to fish salvage operations.

Last year, by sheer numbers, the crabs hampered fish salvage operations which routinely rescue fish, including some endangered species, from water being pumped from the Delta. At the CVP plant, the crabs overwhelmed the fish salvage efforts and operations for about two weeks.

Millions of fish are collected each year by fish salvage operations at both pumping plants. The rescued fish are transported in tanker trucks and released safely and alive in the western Delta.

The Chinese mitten crab is one of about 200 exotic species which have invaded the Delta and San Francisco Bay since the Gold Rush era. Chinese mitten crabs first were documented in California waters in 1992. They originated in Asia and are widespread in coastal rivers of China and Korea. The crabs are palm-sized, with adult shells measuring about three inches across. Adult crabs have dense patches of hair on their legs and claws, inspiring their "mitten" crab name.

Biologists suspect they may have been introduced into California waters via discharge of ballast water from vessels traveling internationally or deliberately by persons wishing to introduce them to California.

It is illegal in California to possess or transport live Chinese mitten crabs.

Persons wishing more information about Chinese mitten crabs may access State and federal websites. The DFG Chinese mitten crab website is: <http://www2.delta.dfg.ca.gov/mittencrab/index.html> The Bureau's mitten crab website is: <http://www.mp.usbr.gov/mittencrabs.html>

Federal and State water project officials said they plan to alert the news media when significant numbers of crabs begin appearing near the pumps.

At that time, a Delta press availability will be scheduled at the CVP plant near Tracy to give news crews an opportunity to film and report on the seasonal crab surge near the pumps and efforts to

keep them from interfering with project operations.

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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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