



NEWS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Late Storms Allow 5 Percent Allocation to State Water Project Users Means Delta Barriers Avoided and Drought Relief Actions For Fish Fast-Tracked

Additional Action Sought on Water Quality Standards

SACRAMENTO – Rain and snow from February and March storms have allowed the Department of Water Resources (DWR) to increase water contract allocations for State Water Project (SWP) deliveries from zero to five percent. Precipitation from these recent storms also eliminates the current need for rock barriers to be constructed in the Delta to prevent saltwater intrusion. Additional flexibility in salinity control requirements is being sought as an alternative to the Delta rock barriers that is less harmful for fish, wildlife, and other Delta water users. The Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) announced that it will fast-track actions to manage and reduce the drought's impact on fish.

“During February and March, state and federal water agencies worked together to capture storm runoff and increase our water supplies. As a result, the late spring storms have translated into much needed water supplies for communities, farmers and environmental habitat,” said DWR Director Mark Cowin. “As this drought continues, we need all Californians to remain vigilant and use every drop of water wisely.”

The most up-to-date runoff and snow pack data show that February and March storms have increased reservoir storage modestly. While this storm runoff is not nearly enough to take California out of the current extreme drought, this minimal increase in water supply will allow the SWP and the federal Central Valley Project (CVP) to limit saltwater intrusion into the inner Delta without immediately installing rock barriers in Delta channels, which have adverse impacts on fish and wildlife and worsen water quality for some agricultural users in the Delta. DWR will closely monitor key water quality and storage capacity data to determine whether barriers are needed later in the year to protect the quality of vital water supplies for Contra Costa, Alameda, and Santa Clara counties, as well as other water users who rely on drinking water supplies from the Delta. DWR is requesting the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) to relocate a salinity control point from the Emmaton location slightly up the Delta to Three Mile Slough. This change would continue to ensure adequate salinity controls within the Delta and enables more flexible use of reservoir supplies for

purposes other than outflow to the Pacific Ocean.

“Thanks to early, bold action by the state and federal water agencies and recent water conservation by residents across the state, we are able to increase water allocations and avoid installing rock barriers at this time in the Delta,” said California Natural Resources Secretary John Laird. “Reducing the impact to iconic fish species that rely on the Delta continues to be central to our management efforts. Every Californian can help during this drought by doing their part to reduce their water usage in their homes and businesses.”

The recently released [Drought Operations Plan](#) calls for DWR to reassess the need for barriers in the fall and early winter, if dry conditions persist. DWR will continue to closely monitor water quality and storage capacity data in case barriers are needed later in the year to protect vital water supplies.

Measures to protect various species of salmon, trout, smelt, and other fish that breed in or travel through the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers and the Delta will continue be vital part of managing water during the drought. Robust and real-time monitoring systems to track the impact of the drought and related water management decisions is particularly important.

“Drought causes real and lasting impacts on California’s fish and wildlife. Important steps can be taken now to help,” said Chuck Bonham, Director of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. “For example, we will move immediately to more closely monitor evolving drought impacts on protected fish. After fast tracking this additional monitoring, habitat and fish passage projects in the Upper Sacramento River system for the benefit of winter run, spring run, and fall run Chinook can be pursued later in the year.”

Allocations

As the current drought persisted into its third year, on January 31, DWR announced its first zero water allocation (water delivery estimate) ever for all State Water Project contractors. The SWP supplies water to 29 public agencies serving more than 25 million Californians and irrigates nearly a million acres of irrigated farmland.

Collectively, the 29 SWP “contractors” requested just over 4 million acre-feet of water to be delivered this calendar year. The increase to a five percent allocation will make a little more than 200,000 acre-feet available. An acre-foot is enough water to supply a family of four for approximately a year.

The only previous zero allocation in the 54-year history of the SWP was for agriculture in 1991, but cities and others that year received 30 percent of requested amounts. Allocations are no longer made separately for agriculture.

At this year’s “zero” allocation, only “carryover” water stored by local agencies, water transferred from willing sellers to buyers and supplies for drinking, sanitation and fire protection were guaranteed to be delivered.

Although nearly all areas served by the SWP also use other sources of water such as groundwater and water stored locally, a zero percent allocation translated to major harm to agricultural operations in the Central Valley.

Salinity Barriers

As discussed in the Drought Operations Plan, the temporary rock barriers would have blocked Sacramento River water from branching into Sutter and Steamboat sloughs near Courtland and prevented San Joaquin River water from flowing into False River near Oakley. The Sutter and

Steamboat barriers would have kept more fresh water in the main channel of the Sacramento River to more forcefully repel salt water coming from the San Francisco Bay, while the False River barrier would have controlled tidal salinity in the central Delta.

However, these barriers would have also worsened water quality conditions for some agricultural water users in the northern Delta, adversely affecting Delta fisheries and impacting boating and recreation in the Delta. DWR has concluded that it can avoid these impacts with the captured runoff from recent storms, at least in the short term, while reducing the amount of water needed from upstream reservoirs to control salinity in the Delta.

During the drought of 1976-77, Delta barriers were constructed that allowed operators to preserve water in reservoirs they otherwise would have had to release to maintain salinity standards in Delta channels. Instead of installing barriers this year, DWR will seek a modification of the State Water Board's western Delta salinity requirements that will reduce the amount of water necessary for compliance, while maintaining adequate water quality in the interior Delta. DWR will provide the State Water Board with data to show that the requested modification will not harm municipal and agricultural users of water in the Delta.

Steps to Manage Drought Impacts on Fish and Wildlife

Working with the National Marine Fisheries Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife will "fast track" the development and implementation of a monitoring effort in the Sacramento River to, among other things, monitor and manage fish spawning, rearing, and stranding conditions, with a specific focus on closely watching temperature conditions and winter run Chinook.

The Department will also start immediately, in coordination with federal fish and wildlife agencies, to implement monitoring actions detailed in the Drought Operations Plan for Delta and long-fin smelt, green sturgeon, and salmon and steelhead. The Drought Operations Plan, as well as the California Water Action Plan, identified specific improvements to the biological and species' monitoring needs in the Delta to utilize better technology for scientific monitoring such as new modeling, modern tracking systems, and improved marking of fish. This work will be done in collaboration with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and California Department of Water Resources, and will build on ongoing collaborative efforts with conservation organizations, scientific experts, and public water agencies.

Later this year, the Department plans to work with the National Marine Fisheries Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to complete restoration and fish passage projects for the benefit of several runs of salmon in the Upper Sacramento River and its tributaries.

Additional Drought Impacts, Reservoir Capacities

In addition to economic ripples caused by farmland fallowing and the loss of agricultural jobs, California is bracing for the impacts of a severe, drought-fueled wildfire season and some communities are taking emergency action to supply drinking water to homes.

Water content in the Sierra snowpack that normally provides about a third of the water for California cities and farms was at only 32 percent of its historical average in early April and with the spring melt underway now is down to 21 percent of its historical average for the date.

Even with most of the stormy season behind us, the state's key reservoirs remain well below normal levels.

Lake Oroville in Butte County, the SWP's principal reservoir, is at 52 percent of its 3.5 million acre-foot capacity (66 percent of its historical average for the date). Shasta Lake north of Redding, California's

and the federal Central Valley Project's (CVP) largest reservoir, is at 53 percent of its 4.5 million acre-foot capacity and 63 percent of its historical average for this time of year. San Luis Reservoir, a critical south-of-Delta pool for both the SWP and CVP, is at 46 percent of its 2 million acre-foot capacity (52 percent of normal for the date).

The final SWP allocation for calendar year 2013 was 35 percent of requested water amounts. In 2012, the final allocation was 65 percent. It was 80 percent in 2011, up dramatically from an initial allocation of 25 percent. The final allocation was 50 percent in 2010, 40 percent in 2009, 35 percent in 2008, and 60 percent in 2007. The last 100 percent allocation – difficult to achieve even in wet years because of Delta pumping restrictions to protect threatened and endangered fish – was in 2006.

The final allocation in 1991 is still the record low, not only for agriculture at zero but for others at 30 percent of requested amounts.

Governor Brown has called on all Californians to reduce their water use by 20 percent – visit SaveOurH2O.org for ideas about how to conserve, and visit Drought.CA.Gov to learn more about how California is dealing with the effects of the drought.