

CALFED OPERATIONS COORDINATION GROUP
MEETING NOTES AND ACTION ITEMS
March 27, 2002

Announcements

Review of February 7 meeting notes

No comments were received.

Review of February 20 meeting notes

No comments were received.

Handouts

1. Update on Winter-Run Chinook Salmon, Steelhead, Spring-Run Chinook Salmon and Late Fall-Run Chinook Salmon, dated March 27, 2002; Bruce Oppenheim, NMFS.
2. CALFED OPS GROUP Operations Briefing, dated March 27, 2002; Curtis Creel, DWR.

SWRCB Activities

Update on SWRCB activities

- The SWRCB conditionally approved on March 12, 2002, the revised Water Level Response Plan for use of the Joint Point of Diversion. Parties who object to the approval have until April 11 to petition for reconsideration.
- Parties to the Phase 8 Settlement Agreement described to the SWRCB at a workshop on March 21 their progress in the negotiations. All parties expressed satisfaction with the progress.
- A hearing on the water right applications filed by the cities of Fairfield, Vacaville and Benicia is set for June 18. This hearing will address the priorities which the Cities claim under the Watershed Protection Act (Water Code 11460 et seq.) and under municipal preference (Water Code 1460). The Cities assert that they are within the Sacramento River system pursuant to Water Code 1215 et seq.
- A hearing on the proposed transfer of water from the Imperial Irrigation District and the San Diego County Water Authority is set to begin on April 23 in Sacramento. This transfer is a key element in the settlement of Colorado River issues. Also, a workshop on the legal classification of groundwater is set for April 10 in Sacramento and on April 11 in Ontario.
- The SWRCB received a proposed Fisheries Operations Plan for use of Joint Point of Diversion. The SWRCB will consider the proposed plan, the comments of the fishery agencies and other relevant information in determining whether and how to approve the plan. However, in order to use the joint point of diversion under Conditions 2(a)(5) of Decision 1641, both the Water Level Response Plan and the Fish Response Plan are needed.
- A Narrative Salmon Objective Workshop will be held in November 2002.

Fishery Status

Status of Sacramento River Monitoring

The numbers initially increased in March, but now are low. The winter-run size Chinook has left the Delta. Monitoring is less this year due to funding/resources limitations. The possibility exists that fish numbers can be determined through other monitoring points. NMFS has issued the Juvenile Production Estimate. A suggestion was made to refine the estimates to reflect the changes, however, a discussion did not follow. Instead, a discussion regarding the low numbers of fish in the Delta ensued.

Steelhead, Winter-Run and Spring-Run Chinook Salmon

The draft OCAP biological opinion on steelhead (which also includes Spring-Run) is completed. It will be sent out to DWR and Reclamation during the first week of April for review. NMFS amended the 60-day authorization take number.

In March, the steelhead salvage at the pumps increased and the number of outmigrating juveniles peaked. The salvage number is at approximately 1,000 (which is under the re-consultation level of 4,500). The numbers of hatchery adults in the Feather River is higher than average while the number is lower than average on the American River.

Reclamation is conducting redd counts in the American River. It was pointed out a comparison cannot be done due to a lack of data.

Monitoring the loss rate of the spring-run surrogate (which are the CWT late-fall run Chinook) releases indicate the numbers are below one percent. The winter-run hatchery fish are considered endangered and help with the numbers. The late fall-run Chinook are spawning in the Sacramento River. Approximately 1,700 redds have been counted. The redd counts are higher this year than last year. The number of redds can be affected by a decrease in flow.

Splittail

The salvage numbers are low at both facilities. A correction was made in the Federal Registry regarding the deadline for the comment period on listing the Sacramento Splittail. It is May 21 and not October 15.

Delta Smelt

Smelt were located near Montezuma Slough in March. The 14-day running average of delta smelt salvage is 5. A total of 237 smelt were caught. The 20-mm survey began during the week of March 18. The results will be posted on DFG's Bay Delta website.

Work Group Activities

OFF Update

There have been three OFF calls regarding b(2) implementation with the February 5 court decision, re-operation, definitions of b(1) and b(2), banking, and carryover. It was pointed out that not enough attention is paid to b(1). A discussion of the purpose of the OFF calls followed. The role of OFF in the CALFED Ops Group is viewed as a stakeholder-driven process with agency participation in which issues can be framed and input provided to the Department of Interior.

DAT Update

No big issues have been identified during the weekly calls. There haven't been any recommendations for fish actions.

Delta Cross Channel Gate Operations Experiment

Between May 21 and June 15, a proposal was made to operate the DCC gates halftime. Two studies would be conducted regarding the outmigration of striped bass and flow conditions. Nighttime closures would be more favorable than daytime closures because it would minimize the impacts to boaters. EBMUD conducted studies (before and during VAMP, and in the Fall) on salmon outmigration. The data received from studying the salmon migration in the Fall was valuable. This experiment would evaluate whether the striped bass migration is similar to the salmon migration. Water quality may be an issue during this period (either at Emmanton or Jersey Point). Emmanton though responds quickly to DCC operations. EPA will work with the USBR to determine whether this experiment can be implemented.

Operations Status

CVP/SWP Operations Status

Excess conditions in the Delta continue. Exports are restricted by the 14-day running average E/I Ratio. Reservoir releases are near minimum. Tracy Pumping Plant is at full capacity. Reclamation is watching the water level in Folsom Reservoir since it encroaches into the flood reservation on both the USACE and SAFCA flood diagrams.

The Feather River flow continues at 1,200 cfs. The storage in Oroville is higher this year than last. The SWP has reduced pumping since San Luis Reservoir is physically full. There are about 70 TAF of EWA assets held in San Luis Reservoir which are being converted on a daily basis to SWP project water.

The relaxation of the E/I Ratio allowed the projects' flexibility to be utilized and the water acquired and subsequently stored in San Luis Reservoir for use later for fishery benefits (i.e.: curtailments at the end of February/beginning of March). The idea was to take

advantage of excess flows in the Delta allowing for higher exports when fish are not present, then later take an export curtailment when fish were present.

Seven proposals were discussed pertaining to the prevention of "spilling" the EWA assets: (1) back water into a CVP or SWP upstream reservoir, (2) perform a reverse source shift with MWD, (3) perform a source shift with other water contractors, (4) perform an exchange with other water contractors, (5) release the water into the San Joaquin Wasteway to help meet the San Joaquin River flow requirements at Vernalis, (6) exchange the water with Friant users for storage in Millerton Lake and release down the San Joaquin River, and (7) allow the extra water to contribute to outflow.

Issues were identified with the first six proposals. The difficulty with the first proposal is twofold. The SWP cannot back water into Lake Oroville because minimum releases are being made. Reclamation is concerned that release reductions at Keswick Reservoir may be constrained by Wilkins Slough flow or temperature requirements. The issue with the second proposal is that the SWP does not have any capacity downstream of Edmonston Pumping Plant to move additional water into Castaic Lake. The third and fourth proposals had merit; but only could be implemented as an exchange, and not as a source shift. However, the Management Agencies believe the environmental benefits of allowing the water to contribute to outflow outweigh potential benefits of exchanging the water at a rate of 3:1 with SWP contractors. The fifth and sixth proposals were considered; however, the Management Agencies felt, if the water were released into the San Joaquin Wasteway, the EWA would not benefit due to the low return rate. There was not a problem with the last proposal since it would benefit the Delta; however other proposals would allow the Management Agencies to retain more flexibility with the EWA.

Delta Operations Criteria

Refer to the briefing package for information. There wasn't any time for a discussion.

2002 Operations Plan

VAMP

The target flow will likely be 3,200 cfs this year; however, it may increase to 4,450 cfs if the hydrology changes.

Construction of the barriers begins April 1 with completion set for April 15.

EWA/b(2) Interaction and Allocation Augmentation Tools

A discussion and presentation followed with material similar to what was presented in the Bennett Raley/Mary Nichols meeting. Four alternatives were presented that would provide fishery protection while also increase CVP south-of-Delta agricultural allocations.

A discussion regarding the accounting of replacement pumping as stated in Decision 1485 (the CVP's base case) versus b(2) followed.

An EWA/b(2) Accounting Workshop will be held either April 18 or April 19 which will cover the period between October and January and 2002 Operations.

ESA Commitment

The letter from the Project Agencies is still in draft. Functional equivalence will be discussed in the letter. A question arose regarding Tier 1 and whether the assets have been reduced since the ROD was signed; and, if so, by how much. Also, the consequences of the loss of offset/reset are a decrease in releases resulting in a decrease in "state gain" for the EWA.

Action Items

- A request to post the Water Level Response Plan onto the CALFED Ops website was made.
- An OFF call will be set up to discuss the Tier 3 protocols.
- A written response was requested regarding a letter from the Environmental Defense written to DWR which is a companion to that which was written to the Management Agencies.