

# Water Operations Management Team Notes

February 28, 2024

## Members Attending

- Reclamation: Elizabeth Kiteck, Levi Johnson
- USFWS: Jana Affonso
- CDFW: Kristal Davis-Fadtke
- NMFS: Howard Brown
- DWR: Molly White
- SWRCB: Craig Williams (acting)

## Topics/Actions

- Approval of meeting notes from last meeting: 2/27/24
- Upcoming Meetings:
  - Salmon Monitoring Team (SaMT) (weekly on Tuesday): 3/5/24
  - Smelt Monitoring Team (SMT) (weekly on Tuesday): 3/5/24
  - Feather River Operations (monthly first and third Thursdays): 3/7/24
  - American River Group (monthly on third Thursday, and as needed): 3/21/24
  - Stanislaus Watershed Team (monthly on third Wednesday): 3/20/24
  - Clear Creek Technical Team (quarterly on third Thursday): 3/21/24
  - Sacramento River Temperature Task Group (SRTTG) (monthly on fourth Thursday): 3/28/24
- Relevant Assessments
  - Weekly Fish and Water Operations Outlook 2/27/24 – 3/5/24
  - Proposed Action Assessment 2/27/24
  - SaMT ITP Risk Assessment Summary 2/27/24
  - SMT ITP Risk Assessment Summary 2/27/24
- Operational Updates
  - CVP: Trinity River release is 300 cfs. Sacramento River (Keswick) release is 19,000 cfs, decreasing to 16,500 cfs on Saturday (3/2/24), and then to 15,000 cfs

on Sunday (3/3/24). Clear Creek (Whiskeytown) managed release is 200 cfs; spill from the glory hole ceased yesterday (2/27/24). American River (Nimbus) release is 6,000 cfs. Stanislaus River (Goodwin) release is 1,000 cfs. Reclamation's Delta Pumping is at 5 units targeting 4,200 cfs. Federal share of San Luis Reservoir is 918 TAF.

- SWP: Feather River (Oroville-Thermalito Complex) release is 14,000 cfs. Clifton Court Forebay exports are 2,400 cfs. The SWP and CVP are jointly managing to a -2,500 OMR limit. State share of San Luis Reservoir is at 473 TAF.
- Hydrology Update (DWR and Reclamation):
  - The precipitation in the 6-day forecast is predicting heavy rain on Thursday and Friday with most of the state getting some precipitation. Storms are expected to clear by Monday. Along the coast and the Eureka area expect 4-5 inches, 1-1.5 inches expected in the Sierras, 4-6 inches in Yosemite, and south of San Francisco 1-1.5 inches. Moving farther south toward San Diego, expected rain totals decreases to a ¼ inch.

## Upcoming Actions, Updates, and Discussion Items

- Reclamation:
  - No actions or updates.
  - Discussion item: Steelhead thresholds and next steps
- FWS:
  - No actions, updates, or discussion items.
- CDFW:
  - No actions, updates, or discussion items.
- NMFS:
  - No actions, updates, or discussion items.
- DWR:
  - No actions, updates, or discussion items.
- SWRCB:
  - No actions, updates, or discussion items.

## Discussion Items

- *Discussion item: Steelhead thresholds and next steps*

- Reclamation noted that the 100% threshold for steelhead has been exceeded. Reclamation will propose next steps in regards to operations, and the information that was utilized to inform their proposal, which included analyses from SaMT and a review of the 2019 Biological Opinion.
- Information from SaMT:
  - The team analyzed four different scenarios to see how salvage would be impacted including: -2,500 cfs, -1,500 cfs, 0 cfs, and public health and safety. Holding operations at -2,500 cfs OMRI would result in a loss of 240 fish and decreasing operations to -1,500 cfs OMRI would result in losses of 215 fish. It was also noted that salvage has been underestimated by anywhere from 5-30 fish, indicating that OMR might not be a good tool to utilize to reduce salvage long term given its narrow range.
- Currently there is not a JPE to connect OMR to salvage. Instead, other information was used to try to understand why we are seeing such high numbers of steelhead at the pumps.
  - Looked to steelhead trout populations and their numbers seem high. High flows could lead fish to move around more.
  - When looking at the STARS model survival was around 0.8 and 0.9 which is 2 – 4 times greater than what we have seen historically at this time of year. Considered the possibility that conditions are ideal within the Delta resulting in more fish presence, rather than an issue with increased loss and/or salvage.
  - There could also be challenges with hatchery markings, although this is not suspected to be a primary driver.
- Reclamation looked to the 2019 Biological Opinion for existing guidance; the document listed an OMR no more negative than -2,500 cfs. This has been the current level for operations since mid-February. There is concern that this is not enough minimization, and that a different action should be taken to reduce salvage.
- Based on the above information, Reclamation proposed the following: Hold operations at -2,500 cfs OMRI with the understanding that conditions will continue to be evaluated through SaMT.
- Following the above discussion, WOMT agency representatives voted on the following: Hold at -2,500 cfs OMRI and continue evaluating conditions and risks thorough SaMT. WOMT agency representatives voted accordingly:
  - Reclamation: In support
  - CDFW: Abstain
  - NMFS: In support.

- Also noted that there are take limits for steelhead, and that there should be efforts taken to avoid exceeding these limits through March 2024. If exceedance of these limits is expected to occur, then metrics to evaluate a change in course should be created.
- FWS: Abstain
- DWR: In support
- SWRCB: Abstain

## **Elevation Items**

- No elevation items.

## **Action Items**

- No action items.

## **Next Meeting**

Wednesday, March 6, 1–1:50pm