BUREAU OF RECLAMATION

Stanislaus Stepped Release Plan – Water Year 2026 Winter Instability Flows Operations Plan

This Stanislaus Stepped Release Plan (SRP) – Water Year (WY) 2026 Operations Plan (February 2026 Flows) details Reclamation's plan for Goodwin Dam operations to meet WY 2026 Winter Instability Flows (WIF) requirements in February 2026. This Operations Plan incorporates feedback from the Stanislaus Watershed Team (SWT) who discussed the WY 2026 WIF on January 21, 2026, during the monthly coordination meeting. Because the WIF has already been implemented, this document serves as a record of planning and coordination that supported it.

Background

WIFs in February are a component of the daily flow schedule in the 2023 SRP proposed in Reclamation's November 2023 Biological Assessment (2023 BA), evaluated in the National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS's) December 2024 Biological Opinion (2024 BiOp), and implemented per the December 2025 Record of Decision (ROD). As noted in the 2025 ROD Operation Plan (p. 6-4), "Reclamation releases additional flow in February, as provided in the 2023 SRP, to simulate natural variability in the winter hydrograph and to enhance access to varied rearing habitats." The 2025 ROD Operation Plan further notes (p. 6-4) that "Reclamation, through Governance, schedules the winter instability flow volume." Below, Reclamation summarizes the Operations Plan implemented for the WIF in February of WY 2026.

Water Volume Accounting

For February 2026, Reclamation implemented a WIF that was reshaped according to the alternative flow schedule proposed by the SWT (Alternative 2 [Alt-2] - described in **Table 1** and **Figure 1**) for a Critical water year type. The default WIF under the 2023 SRP in a Critical February provides a two-day (48- hours) 1500 cfs (~6 TAF) peak. Alt-2 proposed roughly this same amount distributed over six days to allow for a more substantial instability flow action and variability in the hydrograph.

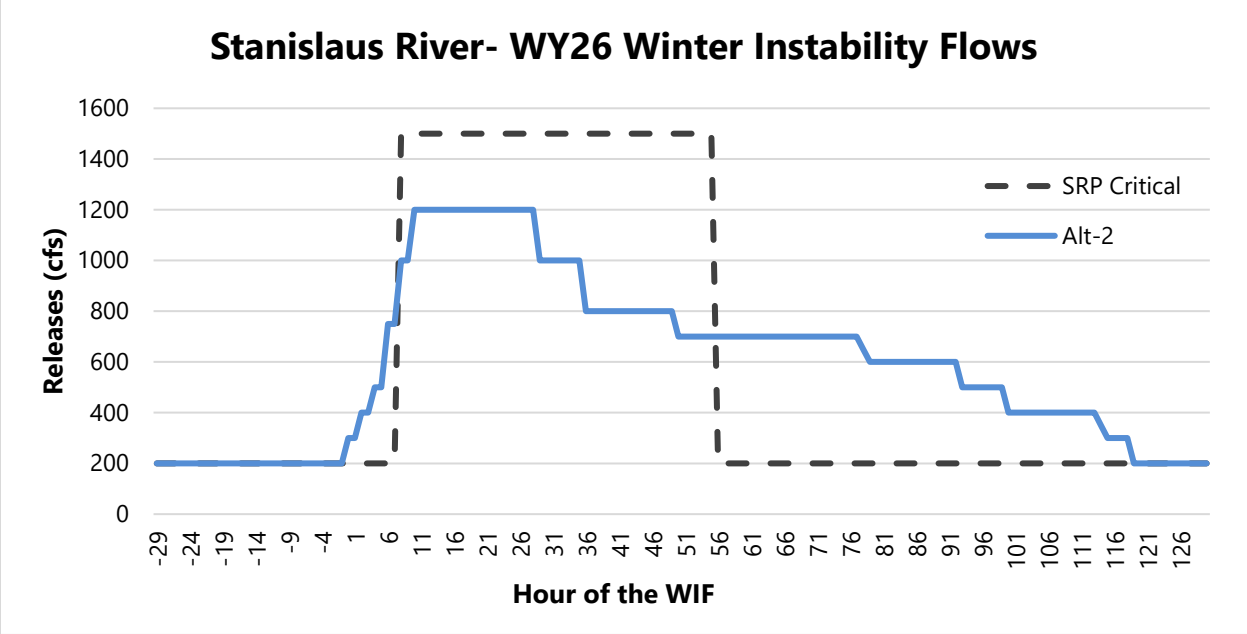

Figure 1. Hourly flows in the proposed Alternative 2 (Alt-2) and the default SRP for a Critical water year type (SRP Critical).

Figure 1 is a line chart. The y-axis shows the releases in cfs and the x-axis shows the hour of the WIF. A black dotted line depicts the SRP Critical flows option, which has a sharp increase from 200 cfs up to 1,500 cfs in hour 6 and a sharp decrease back to 200 cfs at hour 56 of the WIF. A blue solid line depicts the proposed Alternative 2 flow option. Alternative 2 increases slowly in the first 10 hours from 200 cfs to 1,200 cfs before slowly returning back to 200 cfs at hour 120 of the WIF.

Reshaping

The shape of the alternative flow schedule, with a rapidly rising limb and staggered descending limb, is a flow pattern associated with storm events. Reshaping the sub-daily flow pattern to increase the peak flow to 1,200 cfs for eighteen hours on the second day of the pulse may help inundate a greater portion of the Honolulu Bar restoration area and will likely allow at least partial inundation of the Lancaster Road restoration area. Short-term inundation of shallow water habitat can provide benefits to rearing salmonids (e.g., temporary spatial refuges from large predators, increased temperatures that may allow short-term increases in growth rate, and increased capture of terrestrial food and nutrients to the main channel).

According to the 2023 SRP flow schedule, the annual default February WIF begins on the 20th. In the past, WIFs, pulses of regulated flows, have been shifted in time to coincide with a natural storm event. This allows to better capture the characteristics of a natural hydrograph (i.e., runoff, turbidity, meteorological conditions) associated with a storm event. The SWT suggested Reclamation follows this method for the February WIF. With this approach, Reclamation scheduled the WIF to coincide with a predicted storm event in the area with a start date on the 19th. Due to the storm event, Tulloch flood control releases were required which were implemented by adjusting the WIF flows to start on the 18th and remaining at 400 cfs on the

23rd. The timing of the WIF also took into consideration the needs of our partner agencies to safely conduct surveys in the river.

Initially, two alternatives were presented to the SWT. After review and feedback, the group designated Alternative 2 as their preferred flow schedule. Alt-2 includes a rapid ramp up on Day 1 and a Day 2 peak of 1200 cfs. The flows decrease in a staggered manner after that until they reach SRP base flows (200 cfs) by 4 p.m. of day 6. It was expected that this flow alternative provided a greater variability in the winter hydrograph by simulating a small storm pulse.

In summary, the previous discussions informed Reclamation's decision to implement Alt-2.

Table 1. Hourly Flow Schedule for the default SRP Critical and Alternative 2

Date in February 2026	Hour	SRP Critical (cfs)	Alternative 2 (cfs)
19	1	200	200
19	2	200	200
19	3	200	200
19	4	200	200
19	5	200	200
19	6	200	200
19	7	200	200
19	8	200	200
19	9	200	200
19	10	200	200
19	11	200	200
19	12	200	200
19	13	200	200
19	14	200	200
19	15	200	200
19	16	200	200
19	17	200	300
19	18	200	300
19	19	200	400
19	20	200	400
19	21	200	500
19	22	200	500
19	23	200	750
19	24	200	750
20	1	1500	1000

Date in February 2026	Hour	SRP Critical (cfs)	Alternative 2 (cfs)
20	2	1500	1000
20	3	1500	1200
20	4	1500	1200
20	5	1500	1200
20	6	1500	1200
20	7	1500	1200
20	8	1500	1200
20	9	1500	1200
20	10	1500	1200
20	11	1500	1200
20	12	1500	1200
20	13	1500	1200
20	14	1500	1200
20	15	1500	1200
20	16	1500	1200
20	17	1500	1200
20	18	1500	1200
20	19	1500	1200
20	20	1500	1200
20	21	1500	1200
20	22	1500	1000
20	23	1500	1000
20	24	1500	1000
21	1	1500	1000
21	2	1500	800
21	3	1500	800
21	4	1500	800
21	5	1500	800
21	6	1500	800
21	7	1500	800
21	8	1500	800
21	9	1500	800
21	10	1500	800
21	11	1500	800
21	12	1500	800

Date in February 2026	Hour	SRP Critical (cfs)	Alternative 2 (cfs)
21	13	1500	800
21	14	1500	700
21	15	1500	700
21	16	1500	700
21	17	1500	700
21	18	1500	700
21	19	1500	700
21	20	1500	700
21	21	1500	700
21	22	1500	700
21	23	1500	700
21	24	1500	700
22	1	200	700
22	2	200	700
22	3	200	700
22	4	200	700
22	5	200	700
22	6	200	700
22	7	200	700
22	8	200	700
22	9	200	700
22	10	200	700
22	11	200	700
22	12	200	700
22	13	200	700
22	14	200	700
22	15	200	700
22	16	200	700
22	17	200	700
22	18	200	700
22	19	200	700
22	20	200	700
22	21	200	700
22	22	200	700
22	23	200	600

Date in February 2026	Hour	SRP Critical (cfs)	Alternative 2 (cfs)
22	24	200	600
23	1	200	600
23	2	200	600
23	3	200	600
23	4	200	600
23	5	200	600
23	6	200	600
23	7	200	600
23	8	200	600
23	9	200	600
23	10	200	600
23	11	200	600
23	12	200	600
23	13	200	600
23	14	200	500
23	15	200	500
23	16	200	500
23	17	200	500
23	18	200	500
23	19	200	500
23	20	200	500
23	21	200	400
23	22	200	400
23	23	200	400
23	24	200	400
24	1	200	400
24	2	200	400
24	3	200	400
24	4	200	400
24	5	200	400
24	6	200	400
24	7	200	400
24	8	200	400
24	9	200	400
24	10	200	400

Date in February 2026	Hour	SRP Critical (cfs)	Alternative 2 (cfs)
24	11	200	300
24	12	200	300
24	13	200	300
24	14	200	300
24	15	200	300
24	16	200	200
24	17	200	200
24	18	200	200
24	19	200	200
24	20	200	200
24	21	200	200
24	22	200	200
24	23	200	200
24	24	200	200
25	1	200	200
25	2	200	200
25	3	200	200
25	4	200	200
25	5	200	200
25	6	200	200
25	7	200	200
25	8	200	200
25	9	200	200
25	10	200	200
25	11	200	200
25	12	200	200
25	13	200	200
25	14	200	200
25	15	200	200
25	16	200	200