

- Bay-Delta Management Report

Summary

This report provides the status of various processes and activities related to the Bay-Delta.

Detailed Report

Delta Vision

The Delta Vision Blue Ribbon Task Force (BRTF) continued to work on development of the Delta Vision Strategic Plan, which is expected to be finalized in October 2008. The BRTF released the third staff draft on August 15, and discussed the draft at their August 21-22 meeting. The third draft does not contain any major changes as compared to the earlier version. Per Board adopted Delta Action Plan, Metropolitan staff is working with the Governor's Delta Vision Stakeholder Coordination Group (which is a coalition of water and business interests) to submit comments on the third draft strategic plan. The Delta Vision BRTF is also soliciting public comment on the draft strategic plan. Public meetings are scheduled throughout the state from August 18 to 28 for the BRTF to provide information, answer questions and hear public comment on the draft strategic plan from interested citizens.

Bay Delta Conservation Plan

The Bay Delta Conservation Plan (BDCP) is continuing to develop conservation measures that consider a variety of key stressors to sensitive fish species and the Delta ecosystem. Technical teams have been established that focus on habitat restoration, conveyance options (currently focused on a dual conveyance configuration that includes a new isolated conveyance component), other stressors (including toxics, invasive species, commercial and recreational fishing, and predation), and operational parameters. Course level evaluation of potential conservation measures was conducted using the Delta Regional Ecosystem Restoration Implementation Plan (DRERIP) models developed by the Department of Fish and Game. The draft strategy report is expected by early Fall 2008.

Near-term Delta Actions

Two-Gates Fisheries Protection Plan

As a part of the interim remedy order of December 14, 2007, Judge Wanger imposed restrictions on reverse flows in the south Delta to ensure protection of the Delta smelt from entrainment. The interim remedy order details specific flow requirements for Delta smelt protection until a revised biological opinion is certified. The two-gates fisheries protection plan involves the installation of new temporary gates in central Delta channels that will be operated to reduce fish salvage and water supply restrictions at the State and Federal export facilities. The two-gates plan also improves water quality for in-Delta urban and agricultural interests. Metropolitan has been working with a team focusing the combined resources of the State Water Contractors, Central Valley Contractors and the Contra Costa Water District to establish the optimal locations of the temporary gates and to expedite the implementation process. The Department of Water Resources and the US Bureau of Reclamation have been consulted and are providing guidance to the process. In addition, the project team is pursuing environmental documentation, design and construction measures to achieve in-service operation of the gates as early as 2009.

Delta Operations

Endangered Species Act Consultations Regarding SWP and CVP Operations

On May 16, 2008, the Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) submitted its Biological Assessment (BA) to the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). The BA describes the intended operation of the Central Valley Project and State Water Project, and the impacts of those operations on certain fish species listed under the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). Submission of the BA starts the

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formal consultation process under the ESA to obtain new Biological Opinions (BiOp) and take authorizations covering operation of the two projects. One BiOp, to be issued by the USFWS, will cover the Delta smelt. The other BiOp, to be issued by NMFS, will cover salmonid species. The USFWS has asked the USBR to supplement the BA with additional information and modeling which USBR is currently providing.

Judge Wanger's December 14, 2008 Order on Interim Remedies set a September 15, 2008 deadline for issuance of the new Delta smelt BiOp. However, the Federal Government recently asked Judge Wanger to push back the deadline for the Delta smelt BiOp to December 15, 2008, because of the complexity of the ESA consultation and the need to coordinate with NMFS. The plaintiffs in the Delta smelt case have not opposed this request to extend the deadline for the Delta smelt BiOp. The current deadline for issuance of the salmon BiOp is March 2, 2009.

State Water Resources Control Board Issues

The State Board has scheduled public workshops on San Joaquin River flow objectives and salinity in the southern Delta for September 17 and November 5, 2008. The workshops are primarily intended to provide the Board with background information and updates on the flow objectives and on the Vernalis Adaptive Management Plan salmon experiment. The Board also anticipates presentation of information on its efforts to address southern Delta salinity in recognition of the linkage between San Joaquin River flows and salinity. The information gathered will be used to define and more narrowly focus the scope of subsequent workshops on particular issues relating to the San Joaquin River flow objective and southern Delta salinity. Those issues were specifically identified in the Board's Strategic Workplan on Bay-Delta issues adopted on July 16, 2008. Metropolitan staff, along with other state water contractors, is preparing to participate in the workshops and submit technical information as appropriate.

Other Stressors

Concerns Regarding Ammonia Levels in Delta Waters

Recent studies by University of California on the San Francisco Bay-Delta Estuary suggest that ammonia levels in Delta waters may limit primary productivity; thereby interrupting the food web and affecting the Delta smelt population. Major sources of ammonia loading to the Delta include wastewater treatment plant discharges and agricultural discharges. The State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) and Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Board) have initiated the Algal Production Study and the Delta Smelt Study to evaluate the effects of ambient ammonia concentrations on algal primary productivity and Delta smelt survival, as part of their water quality actions in the Strategic Workplan for the Bay-Delta Estuary. These two studies were started this summer, and are expected to be completed by December 2008, although the schedule may be impacted by the ongoing state budget crisis. The Regional Board plans to conduct peer review of the final reports and hold stakeholder meetings in early 2009, to present results and recommendations, receive comments and evaluate next steps. The Regional Board has acknowledged that further studies will be needed to determine the relative importance of ammonia in Delta primary productivity rates and Delta smelt survival, and to determine what additional actions should be taken to control ammonia discharges. Descriptions of the studies are as follows:

Algal Production Study. Primary production rates in the Bay-Delta Estuary are among the lowest of major estuaries in the world and continue to decline. The reasons are unclear, but decreasing primary production is cited as a possible cause of the pelagic organism decline. Researchers at San Francisco State University Romberg Tiburon Center have recently shown that elevated ammonia concentrations reduce diatom (a type of algae that is important in the Bay and Delta) production rates in water samples collected from San Francisco and Suisun Bays. It is not known whether the same effect occurs in the Delta water ways. The Regional Board has contracted with these researchers to conduct experiments with diatoms collected from the lower Sacramento River to determine whether ambient in-stream ammonia concentrations reduce growth rates.

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Delta Smelt Study. Recent monitoring and toxicity tests with ambient Sacramento River water suggested that larval Delta smelt may be sensitive to ammonia at concentrations that occur in the Sacramento River. The Regional Board has contracted with researchers at the University of California, Davis to conduct bioassay tests with larval Delta smelt to determine their sensitivity to ammonia in the lower Sacramento River.

In addition to the State and Regional Board studies, the Interagency Ecological Program, as part of its study program to address the pelagic organism decline in the Delta, is implementing a more comprehensive study to evaluate nutrient sources and phytoplankton communities in the San Joaquin and Sacramento rivers. The study will also evaluate the effects of wastewater management on primary productivity in the Delta. The results of this study are not expected for two to three years.

Currently, Metropolitan staff is working with our coalition partners, including the State Water Contractors and California Urban Water Agencies, to closely track these studies and participate in technical working groups to provide input to study design and implementation. As findings from these studies become available, staff will evaluate the results and identify potential next steps such as additional studies to address unanswered questions and/or advocating for necessary regulatory actions to reduce the identified ammonia impacts.