THE METROPOLITAN WATER DISTRICT OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Report

Office of the General Manager

• Bay-Delta Management Report

Summary

This report provides a summary of the activities related to the Bay-Delta for February 2013.

Purpose

Informational

Detailed Report

Long-Term Delta Actions

Bay Delta Conservation Plan

State and federal agency officials continued to meet this month in the ongoing effort to complete key elements of the Bay Delta Conservation Plan (BDCP). The revised administrative draft of the BDCP is now anticipated for release in March 2013. Metropolitan continues to work with state and federal representatives, the Department of Water Resources (DWR), and other public water agencies to support completion of a Public Draft BDCP and Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR)/Environmental Impact Statement, which is scheduled for release in mid 2013.

Delta Stewardship Council

Staff continued to participate in the Delta Stewardship Council (Council) process to finalize the Delta Plan, the Recirculated Draft EIR that incorporates the Final (Eighth) Draft Delta Plan as its preferred project, and the Office of Administrative Law (OAL) process to validate the Delta Plan regulatory policies. The Council held a public meeting on February 21, which focused on the process and timeline to finalize the Delta Plan, the BDCP implementation structure, State Water Resources Control Board issues, and updates from the Lead Scientist and Independent Science Board. The Council expects to review major comment themes and proposed responses on all draft documents related to its Delta Plan in March 2013 and to adopt the final Delta Plan and certify the EIR sometime in the spring of 2013. If this schedule holds, the Council expects to complete the OAL process in the summer of 2013.

Near-Term Delta Actions

Turbidity Forecasting

Turbidity that entered the central and south Delta during the early December 2012 storm has settled, although wind events have occasionally resulted in brief periods of re-suspension. Metropolitan staff hypothesize that the recent low-level salvage of fish at the south Delta export facilities represents fish that entered the south Delta during the early December 2012 storm rather than fish being drawn to the south Delta through operation of the SWP export pumps and reverse Old and Middle River flows.

Staff continues to monitor DWR's progress in piloting and adopting turbidity forecasting tools. Staff also continues to work on development, refinement and application of forecasting tools, and is conducting a retrospective analysis of 2012/13 Delta turbidity and Delta smelt salvage conditions.

Habitat Restoration

Progress continued in February on the Lower Yolo Bypass tidal marsh restoration project, which could create over 1,000 acres of both salmon and Delta smelt habitat to meet the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) requirements in their respective biological opinions. According to new research by the San Francisco Estuary Institute, the project site historically held a uniquely rich location at the intersection of the Putah Creek fan, historic Yolo Basin floodway and north Delta tidal marshes. Based on this unique hydrological confluence of water sources, a new alternative is now being prepared that alters the original project design. Called the Tidal Marsh Complex alternative, this new concept substantially minimizes the amount of earthmoving needed to construct the wetland complex by preserving and enhancing the historic wetland features already onsite. The design would reduce the soil excavated from 2.5 million cubic yards to 40,000 cubic yards, and would maximize the use of existing intertidal elevations onsite to accommodate predicted sea level rise as well as other challenges, such as salinity mixing and invasive, weedy plants. To improve the design, State and Federal Contractors Water Agency assembled a panel of experts on February 13 to conduct an initial review. The panel recommended that the design be such that it minimizes construction by creating "small notches" in existing non-federal levees onsite, thereby allowing tidal water to slowly move through the marsh plains. This simple approach would maximize the intent of the project in creating desired habitat and securing habitat credits to meet the USFWS and NMFS biological opinions, while minimizing impacts to environmental resources onsite.

The Lower Yolo Project's administrative Draft Environmental Impact Report (ADEIR) is currently under revision, due to recent design changes and further evaluations of additional CEQA alternatives. The revised schedule is for the ADEIR to be released for public review in April 2013 with certification of the Final EIR slated for June 2013.