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Ron Ott and Diversion Effects Group

I have continued to reflect on information presented in the morning of last Thursday's meeting. I am particularly concerned about the salmon information.

The salmon sub-group had prepared a table summarizing their initial cut at evaluating the effects of different CalFed alternatives. The rows were different factors affecting outmigrating salmon smolts as they pass downstream through the Delta. The columns were months of the year. The table was filled in with positive or negative values of 0, 1, 2, or 3, reflecting the sub-group's opinions about the importance of various effects.

The first four rows on the table listed components of direct mortality at Banks and Tracy. Farther down was a row labeled "reverse flows (QWEST)." All the numbers in these rows were either 0 or negative, and there were several -3's.

In response to questions, the sub-group explained that there was a large component of outmigrating smolt mortality unaccounted for and that they had associated that mortality with QWEST, which, of course, is closely related to exports.

Here are some undisputed facts about salmon mortality:

The fraction of outmigrating smolts suffering direct mortality at the export pumps for the period 1979-1991 averaged 1.5%. Any actions taken to affect that mortality could, therefore, only change the total mortality of outmigrating smolts by fractions of a percent.

The mortality of outmigrating smolts passing through the Delta is in the range of 50% with considerable year-to-year variation.

The mortality of adult salmon from legal harvest is 50-70%.

Given these facts, why is direct mortality even included in the evaluation table? If it is included, why aren't all the numbers "0" or why aren't all other factors that could be having a 1-2% effect also listed?

As for the QWEST row--attributing unaccounted for mortality to QWEST (and, therefore, to exports) seems like a real stretch.

The thing that most concerns me about the salmon evaluation is the strong tendency to focus on exports, to include direct mortality even though it is insignificant when compared to other sources and to indirectly attribute unaccounted-for mortality to exports.

What is the basis for this focus? I fear that this is another example of the old paradigm that has dictated project operational requirements for years, namely, that water project operations, especially Delta operations, are the sole significant cause of all fishery problems. I have heard the disavowals of this paradigm, but Thursday morning made me think that maybe it's still alive and well.

B.J.