

CALFED OPERATIONS COORDINATION GROUP
MARCH 23, 1999 MEETING NOTES AND ACTION ITEMS

Review of February 17 meeting notes

No revisions were made to the February 17, CALFED Ops meeting notes.

Announcements

The following handouts were provided at the meeting:

1. Letter to M. Machado from L. Snow re: VAMP, etc., DWR, K. Kelly
2. SWP Operations Package, DWR, J. Spence
3. San Joaquin River Forecast, USBR, J. Burke
4. VAMP Supplemental Water Distribution, 2 pages, SJRA, M. Archer
5. Adult Delta Smelt Distribution - Midwater Trawl Survey, DFG, D. Sweetnam

SWRCB

The Bay-Delta water right hearing is now in its 60th day and has generated approximately 1,320 exhibits. Phase 6 is winding down and Phase 7 should begin on Thursday. The subject of Phase 7 is the petition by the USBR for consolidated and conformed Place of Use for the CVP.

UPDATE: Phase 7 began on March 25.

The deadline for closing briefs for Phase 2A is April 19. A motion was received from Dante Nomellini, representing the Central Delta parties requesting the SWRCB to: 1) cease the present proceeding and proceed to triennial review of the 1995 Bay/Delta Plan; 2) establish instream flow requirements for all major tributaries to the Delta before proceeding further with Delta issues; 3) appoint an independent panel of experts to deal with fishery issues; 4) prohibit SWRCB staff and Board members from having any contact with any water right holders. A ruling was issued March 9 denying all four motions.

The San Joaquin River Group Authority has filed two change petitions. The first, for short-term change under Water Code Section 1725, seeks to add the San Joaquin River at Vernalis to the various agency permits and to add fish and wildlife protection as a purpose of use. The second petition seeks to do the same thing on a long-term basis under Water Code Section 1735. Both petitions seek to protect water released pursuant to the San Joaquin River Agreement

from diversion (between last point of control and Vernalis) under Water Code Section 1707. The change becomes effective 5 days after issuance of an order approving the change.

No Name Group

Three NNG conference calls have taken place since the last CALFED Ops Group meeting.

- March 12 – A conference call was conducted at the request of the USBR to discuss pre-pumping use of joint point of diversion to ensure filling of the federal share of San Luis Reservoir prior to the beginning of the pulse flow period (April 15 – May 15).
- March 18 – The USBR withdrew its request for joint point of diversion to fill the federal share of San Luis Reservoir prior to April 15. The second item discussed was the implementation of the San Joaquin River Agreement flows and VAMP exports for water year 1999. A subsequent meeting was scheduled to review and address modeling analysis.
- March 22 – Further discussion of implementation of the SJRA and the VAMP. There was no resolution to the concerns of Delta interests and the participants agreed to bring the issues to the Operations Group.

Agricultural stakeholders in the Delta reiterated their position from the NNG calls that although water quality flow objectives at Vernalis will most likely be met in this first year of VAMP implementation, carryover storage in New Melones and other tributary reservoirs will be decreased. The assertion was made that in subsequent years summer flow will eventually be impacted until floodwater is available for refilling impacted reservoirs and groundwater overdraft. Therefore, agricultural stakeholders in the Delta object to implementation of the VAMP due to this perceived cumulative third party impact.

The USBR pointed out that, aside from the VAMP, it has an independent requirement to meet Vernalis flow objectives under the Delta smelt biological opinions. These objectives require similar flow levels during the same time period as the VAMP. In addition, the issue regarding installation of the head of Old River barrier was raised. Additional detail can be found under the Operations Section of these notes.

The Operations Group on its report to the CALFED Policy Group and the SJRA Management Group will note the dissention on the part of the Delta agricultural

stakeholders although there is consensus agreement among agency members of the CALFED Operations Group for the full implementation of VAMP this year.

Operations

CVP/SWP Operations Status: The precipitation pattern in March is not as wet as previous months this season. Releases from the Trinity River are 500 cfs with Keswick releases expected to decrease from 6,000 cfs to 5,500 cfs over the next few days. Lake Shasta is well below the flood control elevation. American River releases are 4,000 cfs and are expected to stay at this level into the near future. Tracy Pumping Plant is pumping at capacity and the USBR expects to fill its share of San Luis Reservoir by mid-April. New Melones releases are steady at 1,300 cfs. All CVP reservoirs are full or nearly full with very high carryover storage.

UPDATE: Federal share of San Luis Reservoir filled on March 28.

Oroville releases are 4,000 cfs and should remain steady for the next three days. The SWP is on schedule to fill Lake Oroville by June 1. The State's share of San Luis Reservoir is full. Outages on both the east and the west branches of the California Aqueduct caused drawdown on Silverwood and Castaic Reservoirs in Southern California. The Silverwood deficit has been recovered and Castaic is being refilled. The 50% exceedence hydrologic forecast on March 1 shows the Sacramento Valley as a wet water year type.

Delta Operations Criteria: There are presently no concerns in meeting any of the flow, operational, or water quality objectives in the Delta until at least June.

The flashboards of the Suisun Marsh Salinity Control Gate Structure are scheduled to be removed in early April. Preliminary analyses show that the Suisun Marsh salinity objectives will be met for the remainder of the control season (October – May). Although DWR and USBR have received a variance from the SWRCB for meeting those objectives during the three year Chinook salmon passage experiment, project operations will continue to monitor and operate to meet the objectives to the best of their ability.

Temporary Barriers: DWR continues to work towards a target date of April 15 for completing installation of the head of Old River barrier. This timetable includes a five-day notice to begin work for the contractor and two weeks for construction of the barrier. The two-week construction time for HOR barrier is greater than in past years due to the more complicated design this year incorporating six

culverts with operable slide gates. To meet the April 15 target date, the contractor would have to be notified by Thursday, March 25.

DWR will proceed with notifying the contractor so that the April 15 target date can be met. However, final permit approvals have not been received from the fishery agencies. DFG indicated that the 1601 permit is being reviewed. USFWS indicated that this year's installation should be approved. NMFS indicated that additional information would be requested as part of their approval process.

Other factors that raise concern for the scheduled barrier installation include a flow requirement on the San Joaquin River at Vernalis of less than 5,000 cfs for the duration of the two-week installation period and flow below 7,500 cfs while the barrier is in place. The USBR indicated flow could exceed this level although its staff believes a 3-day advanced warning could be made prior to excessive flows affecting the HOR. NMFS and USFWS expressed concern about artificially lowering flows on the Stanislaus River to facilitate barrier installation. Reducing the flow below what would normally occur could be detrimental to fish and could negate the positive aspects of the HOR barrier. DFG feels that a delay of a week or so may be beneficial for hatchery production. Keeping all of these issues in mind, DWR will maintain flexibility in its timetable for barrier installation.

San Joaquin River / VAMP: The USGS will be performing measurements to update its rating table for San Joaquin River flow at Vernalis tomorrow, March 24. Significant changes resulted from the rating adjustment conducted two years ago.

SJRA presented the distribution of VAMP supplemental water based on the Division Agreement among the various tributary members.

1999 Operations Plan: DWR and USBR have estimated water supply impacts associated with implementing the eight AFRP Delta Actions. This assessment is incorporated into a plan to minimize the impacts this year. The most recent update of the plan shows balanced conditions in the Delta from June 1999 through February 2000 with constrained operations in April and May this year. All studies assume 50% exceedence hydrology until September 1999 with implementation of the VAMP and May ramping (Delta AFRP Actions 1 and 5, respectively) resulting in 323 taf of export reductions. If 50% hydrology is assumed for water year 2000, then exports would be increased to fill San Luis Reservoir by January 2000. Various recovery options were presented for the case when 90% hydrology is assumed beginning in October. These recovery actions include:

- relaxing the percent of inflow that may be diverted in June from 35% to about 37%
- using joint point of diversion to recover CVP San Luis storage by February 2000
- acquiring water from Yuba and Stanislaus (up to 90 taf)
- relaxing the pumping criterion for Banks Pumping Plant from 6,680 cfs to 7,500 cfs in July through September

The various recovery alternatives presented resulted in continued export and storage impacts of between 55 taf and 133 taf through February 2000. An updated operations plan will be distributed to the NNG at the beginning of April.

Fishery Status

Spring-Run / Steelhead Consultation: DWR and USBR completed their preliminary consultations with NMFS and DFG on March 8. NMFS will issue a draft federal biological opinion in a couple of weeks which will be followed by further discussions with DWR and USBR on the final federal biological opinion expected in early May. At this point DWR will modify its application for spring-run take authorization under section 2081 of the Fish and Game Code with DFG to reflect the federal biological opinion as a SWP baseline condition. The final section 2081 permit might be issued in June.

Spring-Run Chinook Salmon: No Report

Steelhead: No Report

Winter-Run Chinook Salmon: Winter-run salvage has increased in March. Last week the season long expanded salvage doubled to approximately 1,200. This is the time of year when winter-run are actively smolting although there seems to be a one to two week delay in out migration this year. Tissue samples have been taken of fish salvaged from the fish facilities with a two-week processing time. These samples will be used for genetics testing. Together with other data, genetics data could be used to determine if winter-run take is truly escalating.

Splittail: The Sacramento splittail was listed as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act by the USFWS on February 8. The Formal Consultation and Conference on Delta Smelt and Sacramento Splittail (conference opinion) dated March 6, 1995 required the USBR to request that the conference opinion be confirmed by USFWS as a biological opinion in the event that splittail become

listed. The USBR made this request in a letter to USFWS in a letter dated February 18, 1999.

DFG raised concern over the possible ramifications of the new listing on the Real Time Monitoring Program. For monitoring purposes, USFWS has placed take limits of 25,000 juveniles and 2,500 adults per year for threatened species. Over the past three years, approximately 100,000 juveniles have been taken at Mossdale as part of the RTM Program. Therefore, RTM may have to be curtailed this year in order to stay within the prescribed take limits.

Delta Smelt: The latest midwater trawl survey shows Delta smelt collected in Suisun Bay, Montezuma Slough, the Sacramento River, and the south and central Delta. Stations in San Pablo Bay were not sampled due to rough weather. Larval smelt have not been captured in the North Bay Aqueduct larval monitoring survey (started 2/16/99) indicating that spawning has not begun in the Cache Slough area. USFWS beach seine survey collected three adult smelt at Wimpy's launch ramp on March 18. One Delta smelt was collected in February in the Sacramento trawl. The State and federal fish facilities salvaged 122 Delta smelt during the week beginning March 8 and 54 salvaged during the week beginning March 15.

Agenda items for Next Meeting . . . April 21

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March 23, 1999

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