

HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT ON CURRENT HABITAT ISSUES

Update on California Central Valley Water Operations and Habitat Issues

At its April 2024 meeting, the Council asked the Habitat Committee (HC) to provide an update on California water and habitat issues. There are several ongoing actions described below that the Council has commented on in the past, as well as habitat restoration activities, listed below. The Council may wish to provide further guidance on tracking these issues and potentially providing comments.

Current opportunities for public comment

- **California Central Valley Project (CVP) Long-Term Operations Plan by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation):** Reclamation has released a [draft Environmental Impact Statement \(EIS\)](#) to describe and analyze alternatives for operation of the CVP, alternatives for the California Department of Water Resources operation of the State Water Project, and to address the review of the 2019 Biological Opinions. The comment period on Reclamation's Draft EIS closes on September 9, 2024. There wasn't sufficient time for the HC to respond during the public comment period, but the HC is prepared to contribute to a draft comment letter for Council review.

Items HC will continue to follow

- **California State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) update to the Bay-Delta Water Control Plan:** The Bay-Delta Plan establishes water quality control measures and flow requirements to protect beneficial uses in the watershed. Although the public comment period has already concluded for the SWRCB's Bay-Delta Water Control Plan Draft Staff Report, the SWRCB plans to issue a Draft Program of Implementation for public comment and will hold a public hearing in fall 2024.
- **SWRCB Water Temperature Standards:** The Council submitted a [letter](#) on September 12, 2022 to the SWRCB asking for it to reopen and re-evaluate the high water temperature standards under the Water Board's Water Right Order 90-5 in light of best available new science: The HC is not aware of any action to date taken by the Water Board to re-examine Water Rights Order 90-5, or aware of a response to the Council's 2022 letter.
- **[Sites Reservoir Project](#)** would divert and store up to 1.5 million acre-feet of water inflow from the upper Sacramento River primarily for irrigation releases. That SWRCB water permit application is scheduled for [Administrative Hearings](#) through the end of 2024 and early 2025.
- **Delta Conveyance Project** is a plan to directly divert up to 6,000 cubic feet per second of the flow of the Upper Sacramento River into a 36-foot wide, 45-mile long, 150-foot-deep concrete tunnel, and to then deliver that water around and south of the current San Francisco Bay Delta, for delivery to existing pumping plants to pump the water further south. The [Administrative Hearings](#) on this water diversion permit application are

scheduled to begin in early 2025. The Council submitted a comment [letter](#) on this project in October 2020.

- At the request of Reclamation, the [National Academy of Sciences](#) is conducting a review of the monitoring, modeling, and other relevant scientific activities and initiatives that support the long-term operations of the CVP. The operation of these water systems affects species protected under the Endangered Species Act (e.g., Central Valley spring-run Chinook salmon and Sacramento River winter-run Chinook salmon), non-listed species managed under Council jurisdiction (e.g., Central Valley fall-run Chinook salmon), and also may impact designated salmon essential fish habitat. The National Academy of Sciences committee has had five meetings since January 2024 and is scheduled to provide a report in 2025.

Habitat Restoration/Fish Passage projects in the Central Valley (CV)

Additionally, below is a list of some habitat restoration and fish passage projects in the CV that the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and the National Marine Fisheries Service are involved in.

- Winter-run reintroduction into the McCloud River and Battle Creek
- Development of the Spring-run Conservation Hatchery
- Spring-run reintroduction feasibility studies into the North Fork Feather River
- Removal of Sunset Pumps Weir on the Feather River
- New fishway at Daguerre Point Dam on the Yuba River (fall run are present -- will benefit both spring and fall runs)
- Spring-run reintroduction production into the North Yuba River
- Numerous tidal wetland projects in the Delta
- Increased CV salmonid hatchery production and releases into the Bay (this is fall-run focused but increased hatchery influence will need to be considered)
- Additional barrier improvement projects that are outlined in the California Salmon Strategy that will be completed soon (e.g., Big Notch, Tisdale Weir fish passage, Ag Crossing 4, Lower Elkhorn Basin Levee Setback).
- California Department of Fish and Wildlife, National Marine Fisheries Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have been meeting with the Bridge Group (includes fishing interests partnered with influential Sacramento Valley water districts and agricultural entities) and have developed a draft Fall Run Action Plan for the main stem Sacramento River above Verona. We are hoping the plan will be available in the next several months.
- There are also several habitat restoration projects that have occurred in the CV since 2019 (and will occur in the next year or two) as part of the voluntary agreements submitted by the Public Water Agencies.

PFMC
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