

Sacramento River Settlement Contractors: Top Issues

February 2019

Introduction

Sacramento River basin water suppliers are working closely with federal and state agencies, as well as conservation partners, to improve Sacramento River operations in a manner that will provide water for multiple beneficial uses in the Sacramento Valley, including water for cities and rural communities, farms, birds, fish, and recreation. Water users and other involved parties are putting aside their differences to address the significant issues and challenges, some of which are outlined below, to develop the best path forward to improve water management and the environment.

Sacramento River Settlement Contractors

- The Sacramento River Settlement Contractors (SRSC) are various irrigation districts, reclamation districts, mutual water companies, partnerships, corporations, and individuals situated in the Sacramento Valley.
- The SRSC, during the past decade, have been recognized for very progressive water management – including the adoption of new farming techniques, installing fish screens, and providing habitat for wintering waterfowl using the Pacific Flyway.
- The SRSC divert their water supplies in accordance with their “Settlement Contracts” with the Bureau of Reclamation.
- Cumulatively, the senior water rights held by the SRSC entitle them to a significant portion of the water available for appropriation in the Sacramento River, particularly during the irrigation season.
- The SRSC remain committed to helping develop the best solution to comprehensively and effectively manage water in the Sacramento basin.

Attached Background: *Sacramento River Settlement Contractors, Service Area Map*

Voluntary Agreements

- For the last several decades, various debates have focused on concepts such as unimpaired flows, fish vs. farms, equitable apportionment, and competing demands for water. To better address these issues in a comprehensive manner, Voluntary Agreements (VAs) are being sought for the purpose of complying with various regulatory programs for the Sacramento Valley and the Bay-Delta.
- The Voluntary Agreement will provide a portfolio of approaches and actions that will be implemented in lieu of imposing new flow standards under the State Water Resources Control Board’s typical Bay-Delta plan update process. This includes efforts to improve all freshwater life-stages for salmon as part of the *Sacramento Valley Salmon Recovery Program* and associated efforts to *Reactivate our Floodplains* in the Sacramento Valley.
- On December 12, 2018, an initial framework of an agreement was submitted to the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) by the SRSC with input from various parties for further consideration and discussion.
- On March 1, 2019, the SRSC along with other water agencies, conservation partners, state agencies and Reclamation submitted a letter to SWRCB, with a complete Project Description for the Sacramento River consistent with the resolution approved by the SWRCB on December 12, 2018.

Requests:

1. Urge support for the VAs and SWRCB acceptance of the Project Descriptions and development of a Preferred Alternative.
2. Co-sponsor and help advance legislation for the VAs that would collect funds from CVP contractors for the purchase of water supply, science efforts, and restoration projects.

Attached Background: *Voluntary Agreements – A New Way Forward to Improve Conditions for Fish & Wildlife, CNRA Agency Transmittal Letter to SWRCB, Transmittal Letter Signed by 44 Organization Representatives, Press Release, the Sacramento Project Description*
NCWA - Parties Submit Proposal to Advance a Comprehensive Restoration Strategy for the Bay-Delta Watershed as part of Voluntary Agreements to Improve Fish and Wildlife
Introducing a better solution for native fish; Fish Food Project (handout)

Re-initiation of Consultations (ROC)

- The Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) completed a draft Biological Assessment (BA) on January 31, 2019, and has sent the document to the Federal fishery agencies for consultation assessing potential modifications to the continued long-term operation of the Central Valley Project in a coordinated manner with the State Water Project.
- The SRSC have supported the evaluation of alternatives and provided input to the BA that meets the contractual requirements under the Sacramento River Settlement Contracts.

Requests:

1. Urge the Federal Fishery Agencies (NOAA Fisheries, Fish and Wildlife Service) to meet the 135 day consultation response period and complete a Final Biological Opinion by June 2019.
2. Ensure that the Sacramento River Settlement Contractor diversions are included as a covered action in the Consultations.

Sacramento River Mainstem Integrated Water Management Plan

- The Sacramento River Mainstem Integrated Plan is a balanced solution to provide water and habitat for agriculture, fish, wildlife, and other beneficial uses in the Sacramento River region.
- The goal is to create a comprehensive water and habitat management plan that will ultimately result in greater water supply reliability for farmers and communities and enhanced habitat along the Sacramento River for fish and wildlife.
- Participation in this Plan is expected to be very broad, encompassing federal, state and local agencies, irrigators, conservationists, recreational organizations, and business groups.
- The Plan will offer tributary science and governance workgroups as proposed in the Vas.

Requests:

1. Co-sponsor and help advance legislation.
2. Urge support by Reclamation, federal fishery agencies, and other federal agencies to join the Plan.
3. Provide funding as specified in the legislation to implement science, monitoring, and restoration efforts.

Attached Background: *Sacramento River Mainstem Plan Fact Sheet, Draft Legislation*

Sacramento River Science Partnership

- Since water operations and fishery management decision-making on the Sacramento River are intricately connected, it is imperative that integrated science and monitoring programs inform operational decisions and restoration activities.
- By cooperatively identifying, incorporating and improving tools and models, we can ultimately improve operations and salmon recovery.
- The effectiveness of any plans or agreements related to the Sacramento River basin will depend on them being collaborative products that use the best available science and technology.

Requests:

1. Join with the SRSC in the charter for Sacramento River Mainstem Integrated Water and Fish Science and Monitoring Partnership—to voluntarily identify and fund areas of scientific uncertainty and promote collaborative research, modeling, monitoring, and scientific synthesis relevant to salmon recovery and water management on the Sacramento River.
2. Support and fund the development and implementation of new models, monitoring and tools for Shasta Reservoir and the Sacramento River. Co-sponsor and help advance legislation.

Attached Background: *Sacramento River Science Partnership Charter, Sacramento River Science Partnership Workplan, Sacramento River Science Partnership Project Brief*

Summary

Each of these pieces is critical to consider and address for the operations on the Sacramento River to meet the goal of providing water for multiple beneficial uses in the Sacramento Valley. By taking a broad basin approach, coupled with the Voluntary Agreements, to managing water in the region, all of which must be intensely collaborative and integrated, we can better overcome the challenges and find long-term success.