



California Sportfishing Protection Alliance

"An Advocate for Fisheries, Habitat and Water Quality"

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State Board Identifies Delta Flow Needs

CSPA applauds State Water Board staff for identifying flows necessary to Protect Delta

Stockton, CA – Thursday, July 21, 2010. The California Water Resources Control Board has released a draft report identifying increased water flows needed to protect fisheries and water quality in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Estuary. The report was mandated by the California legislature as part of the comprehensive water bill, enacted on 12 November 2001, which directed the water board to “develop new flow criteria for the Delta ecosystem necessary to protect public trust resources” within nine months of enactment. Extensive hearings were conducted during March 2010 and the report will be finalized at the Board’s August meeting.

“For the first time, the Board has come forth with explicit estimates on flows needed to protect the estuary and the results are not surprising,” said Bill Jennings, Executive Director of the California Sportfishing Protection Alliance (CSPA), “The increased flow recommendations are consistent with the vast majority of testimony by scientists, biologists and hydrologists during the recent hearing and with the recommendations of resource agencies and scientists during previous evidentiary hearings over the last 30 years.” “Indeed, they comport with scientific evidence regarding flow needs of the 113 estuaries in the world,” he said.

The 180 -page draft report recommends significantly higher flows for the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers and Delta outflow. For example, the report calls for net Delta outflow between January and June of 75% of 14-day average unimpaired inflow (i.e., without dams or upstream diversions). This compares to the present 30% in drier years). For the Sacramento River, the recommendations are 75% of the 14-day unimpaired flow from November through June (compared to the present 50% average). For the San Joaquin River the recommendations are 60% of the 14-day unimpaired flow from February through June (compared to the present 20% in drier years to almost 50% in wetter years). The recommendations also include fall pulse flows for migrating fish and increased fall outflow in above normal years.

The report emphasizes that the flow recommendations are based on the “best scientific information,” that ecosystem variability in the Delta is crucial and “fundamentally inconsistent with continuing to move large volumes of water through the Delta for export” and that the recommendations are designed to restore estuarine populations as required by law and not simply, as in the biological opinions, to prevent extinction of listed species.

The dramatic increase in water diversions from the estuary in recent decades have sent fisheries and water quality into a downward spiral. Populations of salmon, steelhead, young striped bass, Delta and longfin smelt, splittail, threadfin and American shad and sturgeon, as well as native zooplankton and phytoplankton that comprise the food web, have collapsed.

“Everyone gives lip service to protecting the Delta,” said CSPA attorney Mike Jackson, “These numbers make it clear –as we have always believed – that the Delta needs substantially more water than it has been receiving over the last 30 years if its going to survive.”

The Delta flow recommendations will inform both the Bay Delta Conservation Plan (BDCP) process underway and proceedings of the recently established Delta Stewardship Council. The culmination of those efforts will result in a comprehensive “Delta Plan” that will be forwarded to the State Water Board for subsequent evidentiary hearings that will balance competing water needs, approve potential structural modifications of delivery systems and revise water rights to implement the plan.

CSPA participated fully in the March hearing submitting testimony and recommendations prepared by it’s expert witnesses who had considerable expertise and experience in Delta issues: Dr. Carl Mesick, Dr. G. Fred Lee and three retired Fish and Game biologists; Don Stevens, Dave Kohlhorst and Lee Miller.

Over the years, the State Water Board has conducted a number of hearings on measures necessary to protect the estuary. For example, following a long evidentiary hearing in 1988, the State Board issued a draft water quality control plan that call for substantial reductions in Delta exports. However, then Governor George Deukmejian, at the behest of state and federal water project operators, directed the State Board to withdraw the draft order. Again, in 1992 the State Water Board conducted an extensive evidentiary proceeding and issued a draft water rights order that required increases in flow to protect the estuary (D-1630). And again, the Governor, this time Pete Wilson, directed the Board to withdraw the draft order. Today, pursuant to explicit direction by the state legislature, the State Board has released a draft report on what “what fish need” and measures necessary for Delta protection.

CSPA is a public benefit conservation and research organization established in 1983 for the purpose of conserving, restoring, and enhancing the state’s water quality and fishery resources and their aquatic ecosystems and associated riparian habitats. CSPA’s website is www.calsport.org.