

## Delta Smelt Working Group Meeting/Conference Call Minutes

August 30, 2006

Participating: Mike Chotkowski (USBR), Kevin Fleming (CDFG), Lenny Grimaldo (CDWR), Tracy Hinojosa (CDWR), Ann Lubas-Williams (USBR), Matt Nobriga (CDWR), Ryan Olah (USFWS), Ted Sommer (CDWR), Jim White (CDFG) and Victoria Poage (USFWS, convener and scribe)

### For Discussion:

Items from the draft POD Action Plan

1. Allow the “first flush” in winter to flow through the Delta without increased exports
2. Other items

### Recommendation for WOMT:

The Working Group did not have a recommendation for WOMT for this week.

The Working Group began with discussion of a proposal to allow the first winter flushing flow in the Delta to flow through without increased Project pumping. The first flush has not been formally defined, but can be generically described as the first substantial flow increase of the winter. It generally occurs in association with the first significant rainfall. It has been hypothesized recently that this first flush is a delta smelt spawning migration cue and that low pumping during the event would be an effective way to minimize entrainment of adult delta smelt prior to spawning. If this action were to be done, it was proposed that it be based upon daily Delta inflow and potentially co-occur with the first flow-related closing of the Delta Cross Channel gates (typically closed when Sacramento River flow at Freeport reaches 25,000 cfs). Based on historical data, the first salvage event could occur any time within a window stretching from late December until mid-February. If DCC gate closure occurs early in the season to protect emigrating salmon, or if DCC gate closure for salmon is never needed, a “virtual” closure (e.g., flows that would prompt the Projects to close the DCC if it were not already closed for salmon) that identifies a significant increase in outflow could signal the first flush. Based on USGS data relating flow to delta smelt salvage, exports should not result in net flows at Old and Middle Rivers less than -4000 cfs for at least 7 days, and possibly 14 days or longer.

Examination and discussion of data compiled last year (see notes from November 28, 2005) lead the Working Group to conclude that adult delta smelt salvage is not consistently associated with the first winter flow increase; sometimes it appears to be, sometimes not. Thus, other environmental factors like temperature and hydrodynamic indices (X2 position, E/I ratio, etc.) also may need to be considered. It was hypothesized that upstream movement of delta smelt may begin as Delta temperatures decrease, which may or may not coincide with the first flush. The Working Group concluded last November that further analysis of existing data is needed before a recommendation can be made. This analysis will be done by a small sub-team sharing data; Mike Chotkowski, Kevin Fleming and Matt Nobriga have the necessary data and expertise, and agreed to

meet to develop a model that predicts an “envelope” of environmental conditions that best predicts adult salvage.

With regard to other potential actions discussed in the draft POD Action Plan, the Working Group noted that the Mayberry Point Fish Food Farm had been assigned a lower priority and that the Dutch Slough restoration project had been added to the list of potential actions. Although the Dutch Slough project has yet to complete environmental review or receive funding, the Working Group believed it to be a promising restoration plan based on its scale, likelihood of supporting habitat used by native fishes, and its location in the western Delta where some fishes such as splittail and delta smelt may occur year-around. The project may also result in far more food production than the proposed Mayberry Point project for a lower per-acre cost, in terms of restoration dollars. The project also enjoys broad local support, and may be ready to implement on a much shorter timetable. Operational measures will likely be re-prioritized. Despite uncertainty regarding next year’s Delta conditions and the resulting distribution and abundance of delta smelt, the Working Group believed that operational measures should be featured more prominently in future drafts of the plan.

Action Items:

1. Mike Chotkowski, Kevin Fleming and Matt Nobriga will meet as a subteam to work on the analyses, and will report back to the full Working Group at the next meeting.

Next Scheduled Meeting: Thursday, September 21, 2006, at 2:00 pm in the 1342C conference room at the Resources Building.

Submitted,  
VLP