Delta Smelt Working Group Conference Call Minutes

January 28, 2005

Participating: Ryan Olah (USFWS), Bruce Herbold (USEPA), Zach Hymanson (CBDA), Kevin Fleming (CDFG), Matt Nobriga (CDWR), Mike Chotkowski (USBR), Gonzalo Castillo (USFWS), Victoria Poage (USFWS)

Guests: Tracy Pettit (CDWR) and Amrit Sandhu (CDWR)

The Delta Smelt Working Group met via conference call on January 28 to discuss the following agenda:
1. Preliminary results from CDFG's Spring Kodiak Trawl Survey,
2. Incidental take of adult delta smelt at the SWP and CVP; incidental take has exceeded the concern level in the DSRAM, requiring the DSWG to meet and report to the WOMT,
3. EWA and b(2) placeholders, and
4. Potential configurations for the spring Head of Old River Barrier.

Background: Concern for delta smelt is high in WY 2005, as the FMWT index for 2004 was the lowest recorded. The concern level is set at 892 cumulative incidental take.

Recommendation for WOMT:

After discussion of available monitoring data, the DSWG recommended an export reduction to 1500 cfs combined for 7 days, to take effect as soon as possible, using EWA assets at both Projects. The group will continue to monitor real-time data and, when salvage of adult delta smelt appears to have passed its peak, will recommend that the Projects resume normal operations. The DSWG was asked to offer advice on how to partition the export curtailment between the CVP and SWP; however, the DSWG could not offer substantive advice on how to partition the export curtailment. We presume operations staff is best prepared to make that determination.

1. Preliminary results from the spring Kodiak survey
Because of boat problems early in the week, there were still a few stations left to sample in the Antioch area. As of the time of the call, sampling totaled 165 individuals, about half as many as last year. Eighty-one were caught in the Montezuma Slough area, but the rest were caught in the south and central Delta. The fish appear smaller this year than in previous years. Relatively more appear nearly ready to spawn, but field observations suggest the eggs are smaller and appear to be of relatively poor quality (data will be collected). Delta water temperatures are at about 9^0 C. Captive smelt at the culture facilities spawned last night; researchers will collect information on egg quality, but it is usually poor early-on. The bottom line is that this year delta smelt are not only less abundant, but also smaller, exhibiting early maturity and may be carrying poor-quality eggs.

2. Salvage

Combined salvage at the State and Federal export facilities has reached approximately 1200, exceeding the concern level of 892 (the median value of the ratio of winter salvage to the Recovery Index) found in the USFWS' Biological Opinion on OCAP. The export-to-inflow standard will drop to 35% on Tuesday, February 1, but the State will continue to export approximately 6000-6500 cfs in the base case. Concern thresholds from the DSRAM are:

1. previous year's Recovery Index (R.I. = 25) is below 74
2. adult abundance is low and distribution is unfavorable
3. onset of spawning may be imminent
4. the adult salvage concern level has been surpassed

The DSWG recommended an export reduction to a combined 1500 cfs, to take effect as soon as possible (assumed to be February 2), continuing for 7 days unless adult delta smelt salvage appears to peak prior to February 8. EWA has a February placeholder of 50 TAF, but the recommended action will likely cost much more, potentially as much as 130 TAF. The DSWG assumed a reasonable likelihood that San Luis Reservoir will fill before VAMP and spill EWA debt, and so recommended that EWA assets be used to reduce exports at both facilities.

3. Priority ranking

The DSWG was asked by the B2IT to rank the relative priority of a number of potential actions. The ranking is:

- VAMP; this action will be done and the DSWG supports it. In terms of allocating EWA assets, the real question is dependent upon the experimental treatment selected for this year and the amount of EWA water which that treatment will require.
- February/March actions; the DSWG has recommended an action for February and ranks it very highly.
- Pre- vs. post-VAMP shoulder cannot be ranked at this time; the DSWG needs more information on smelt distribution, water temperatures and sexual maturity before they can reasonably assign a priority.
- June ramping was ranked last.

4. Head of Old River Barrier

In addition to providing a barrier to fish passage, the Head of Old River Barrier has the potential to alter hydrodynamics in the South Delta, which may affect entrainment and/or movement of juvenile delta smelt. The DSWG discussed the potential to modify the installation and/or operation of the HORB. It is believed by some that the HORB is a "leaky" barrier, such that sufficient flow already passes through in its usual configuration, making additional flow added at the barrier insignificant. Others believe that the flow split (e.g., 60:40) at the barrier is less important than the effects of localized channel geometry on transport of larval delta smelt. However, the HORB remains an effective barrier for emigrating salmonids. As an aid to formulating recommendations with regard

to HORB operations, the group will pursue particle tracking modeling. Bruce Herbold will write up scenarios and Matt Nobriga will enquire about the needed hydro input files. If they are available, he will perform the PTM runs. The DSWG need for particle tracking model runs will also be conveyed to WOMT.

Submitted,
VLP