April 2015 Framework of Actions for Managing the Sacramento River for Multiple Beneficial Purposes in 2015

FACT SHEET

With California enduring its fourth consecutive dry year, every drop of water counts and must be stretched as far as possible. Late Wednesday, federal and state project and regulatory agencies (U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, the California Department of Water Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife) and Sacramento River Settlement Contractors (SRSCs) agreed on an integrated framework of actions for CVP/SWP operations for mid-April through November that will flexibly manage the operation of the system to serve multiple beneficial purposes that include water for cities and rural communities, farms, fish and wildlife in the Sacramento Valley. The suite of actions will also help provide water for areas of the state that are in dire need of additional water supplies.

The framework looks at the system as a whole and balances many needs. Issues at play include supplies to agricultural senior water right holders like the SRSC; volumes and timing of transfer water to junior water right holders; upstream temperature management for winter-run Chinook salmon; in-basin habitat needs for wildlife like the giant garter snake and refuges; Delta outflow to benefit pelagic fish like delta smelt and longfin smelt; salinity management in the Delta for drinking water quality; and a host of additional watershed requirements and competing needs in the Trinity, American, and Feather rivers. Agreement on Sacramento River and SRSC operations is the cornerstone to the overall operations of our water management system, and is a key piece which is needed before other decisions about volume and timing of transfers to junior water rights holders can be negotiated.

As a result of the December and February storms in Northern California, storage in Shasta Lake is currently 2.7 million acre-feet, about 330,000 acre-feet higher than in 2014 at this time. Importantly, there is 700,000 acre-feet more water colder than 56° F. With the proposed temperature management plan and anticipated CVP operations assuming conservative inflow estimates, storage in Shasta Lake is projected to be approximately 1.1 million acre-feet at the end of September 2015. Water in Shasta Lake storage and releases to the Sacramento River will be managed carefully to assure the availability of water for the following beneficial purposes during this dry year:

Chinook Salmon. The Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) has prepared a temperature management plan in consultation with federal and state fishery agencies (National Marine Fisheries Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife), which incorporates estimated monthly average Sacramento River flow releases for the remainder of the water year. CVP operations consistent with the temperature management plan are expected to provide adequate cold water for winter-run Chinook salmon egg incubation and rearing in the upper Sacramento River at critical times during the spring, summer, and early fall. The temperature plan was formulated to provide suitable water temperatures (56° F) at the specified compliance point downstream of Keswick Dam. Reclamation will submit the temperature management plan to the State Water Resources Control Board next week as required by the recent Temporary Urgency Change Order.

The following actions are designed to help increase the available cold-water resources, improve habitat for Chinook Salmon, and inform real-time adjustments to the temperature management actions, all of which serve to improve the overall effectiveness of the temperature management plan:

- The State Water Resources Control Board approved (in part) Reclamation's April-September Temporary Urgency Change Petition on April 6, 2015, which will maintain minimum flows for fish downstream in the Delta. This will help Reclamation preserve as much cold water as possible in Lake Shasta for its operations and temperature management throughout the spring and summer as well as for water supply purposes.

- Biologists from the State and Federal fish agencies will be working in the Sacramento River this summer collecting data to help inform Reclamation operations and temperature management decisions in real time. This work will also provide additional data on salmon spawning and rearing that will be useful in future operations during both dry and wet years.

- For the remainder of 2015, the SRSCs, working with the state and federal fishery agencies and conservation partners, will aggressively implement projects included in the Sacramento Valley salmon recovery program. This includes actions to improve spawning in the upper Sacramento River, protect stranding and increase the survival of salmon smolts.

- A significant portion of the anticipated water transfers from the SRSC's will be released in the late summer and fall on a schedule that will provide beneficial habitat conditions for spawning fall-run salmon.

Farms. Once river releases have served salmon, it continues to flow downstream where a portion of the released water is diverted by the SRSC for use by farms and habitat in the Sacramento Valley. These agencies will have their supplies reduced by 25 percent in 2015 in accordance with their contracts.

To assure effective management, the SRSC will:

- Measure their diversions closely to assure compliance with contracts and will coordinate their diversions with Reclamation to help plan more precise real time operations throughout the year.

- Coordinate with Reclamation to adjust diversion schedules for the benefit of fish and wildlife by aligning diversions with Keswick releases for temperature control to maximize the efficient overall operation of the CVP.

- Optimize efficient water use within their service areas and coordinate with Reclamation to effectively transfer water to their neighbors (such as the Tehama Colusa Canal districts) and other water suppliers who have no available surface supplies this year. These water transfers will total approximately 200,000 acre-feet of water this year. This effort will support the Governor's recent Executive Order encouraging such transfers.

- Utilize a portion of revenues derived from water transfers to invest in additional local water supply infrastructure and habitat restoration to provide water for fish, wildlife and farms in the Sacramento Valley.

- Work with the State Water Resources Control Board and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to help enforce laws prohibiting illegal diversions, with the objective to preserve as much water in storage as possible.

Waterfowl. A portion of the water diverted this year will create important habitat within the Pacific Flyway. A large portion of the ricelands within the SRSC's service areas will be farmed to provide fall and winter food sources for millions of birds along the Pacific Flyway and habitat for other listed species such as the Giant Garter Snake.

Any land fallowing will be pursued in a manner that will minimize impacts to these species under the water transfer compliance documents. Glenn-Colusa Irrigation District (GCID) will also deliver water to the three National Wildlife Refuges: Delevan, Sacramento, and Colusa.

Sacramento Area Supplies. The improved coordination of upper river diversions and reservoir releases will help assure adequate river stages at the lower end of the Sacramento River to allow for diversion and use of supplies by the City of Sacramento, the Sacramento County Water Agency and East Bay Municipal Water District at their respective diversions near Sacramento.

Other Delta Beneficial Purposes

In addition, a significant portion of water within the Sacramento Valley flows past Sacramento into the Delta, where it will serve various beneficial purposes including salinity management, fishery habitat, in-delta agricultural needs, and water supply for other portions of the State.

The federal and state agencies and SRSC's will have regular meetings to coordinate these actions and will work closely together throughout the year to assure the effective implementation of this plan. We all agree that we stand a better chance of managing limited water supplies with continued communication and cooperation.