



Bay-Delta Plan Update TALKING POINTS

BACKGROUND

The State Water Resources Control Board is updating the Water Quality Control Plan for the Bay-Delta (Bay-Delta Plan). The purpose of the Bay-Delta Plan is to establish water quality control measures that provide reasonable protection of beneficial uses in the greater Delta watershed, which includes all of the Sacramento Valley and portions of the San Joaquin Valley. The Bay-Delta Plan is currently being updated through two separate processes. The first amendment is focused on the San Joaquin River and southern Delta salinity. The second amendment is focused on the Sacramento River and its tributaries and Delta interior flows and outflow.

State Water Board staff has proposed to establish flow requirements for the rivers that feed into the Delta based on a percentage of "unimpaired flow," which would require a fixed portion of the total inflow to a watershed that would be dedicated to flow out of the Delta. The staff proposal for unimpaired flow for the San Joaquin River is between 30-50% of total inflow, with a starting point of 40%. The staff proposal for unimpaired flow for the Sacramento River is between 45-65% of total inflow, with a starting point of 55%.

- **The State's proposed unimpaired flow approach would have significant impacts on farms, California communities, and the environment.** An unimpaired flow approach would significantly limit drinking water supplies for cities and rural communities, as well as irrigation water supplies for farms and wildlife refuges.
- **The complex issues facing ecosystems in the Delta watershed require a coordinated, comprehensive approach.** Water managers have demonstrated that preserving and restoring fishery resources requires an integration of measures for both water supply and ecosystem management. Negotiated voluntary agreements have proven successful and the most effective means for achieving the policy of coequal goals. The successful recovery of salmon on Butte Creek in the Sacramento Valley is an example of where this approach has worked.
- **The solution needs to be based on the best available science.** The Bay-Delta Plan update should reflect the best available science focusing on the entire life cycle of affected species and multiple variables, such as predation, food and habitat availability. As an example, researchers with the Public Policy Institute of California have detailed a different approach to improving fish and wildlife where functional flows are more precisely targeted to restore natural flow functions and the benefits of land and water interaction as called for by leading scientists.
- **Water leaders support a healthy environment.** Recent science shows that fish populations need more than just a required percent of "unimpaired flows," which ignores the significance of environmental benefits from the land and water interaction that was experienced under natural flow conditions. Habitat restoration, control of predators, increased food supply for native fish, and other factors are also important if we truly want to help struggling fish populations. Water agencies have been involved in many successful projects to research and then implement programs aimed at helping struggling fish populations. Examples include restoring gravel beds for salmon spawning, restoring side channel rearing habitat for juvenile salmon, closing deep pools left over from mining operations that harbor predators, and improving the timing of river pulse flows to better suit fish migration.
- **There are better alternatives.** Water suppliers are committed to sustainably balancing the water supply needs of our communities and our environment. Renewing efforts at voluntary agreements with affected water users and utilizing a more targeted, science-based approach will provide the necessary comprehensive pathway forward.