

# Collaborative Conservation on the Yuba River

## Voluntary Agreement Proposal

### Background

The Secretaries of California's Natural Resources Agency and Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and Sacramento River Basin water agencies are continuing to evaluate and refine proposed voluntary agreements tailored to meet the needs of the different watersheds feeding into the Bay-Delta.

The proposed voluntary agreements represent a collaborative, science-based plan to contribute to the recovery of fish and wildlife species, and are an alternative to the State Water Resources Control Board's proposed one-size-fits-all requirements to release massive amounts of flows in an attempt to improve Bay-Delta fisheries.

The State Water Board is in the process of updating the Water Quality Control Plan for the Bay-Delta to measures that provide reasonable protection of beneficial uses in the Bay-Delta watershed, which includes the Sacramento Valley and portions of the San Joaquin Valley.

### A Framework for the Yuba River

#### Increased Delta inflow

Yuba Water Agency contributions to the proposed voluntary agreements include a base contribution of 9,000 acre-feet in above-normal, below-normal and dry years, primarily from the reoperation of end-of-season storage at Yuba Water facilities. The proposal also includes an additional contribution of up to 41,000 acre-feet in those same years, compensated at \$290 per acre-foot. Because Yuba Water is responsible for just one-third of the total water diverted annually from the Yuba River watershed, this rate reflects the agency's proportionate share of the contribution for Delta inflow.

### Yuba Water Contributions to Proposed Voluntary Agreements

#### Increased Delta Inflow

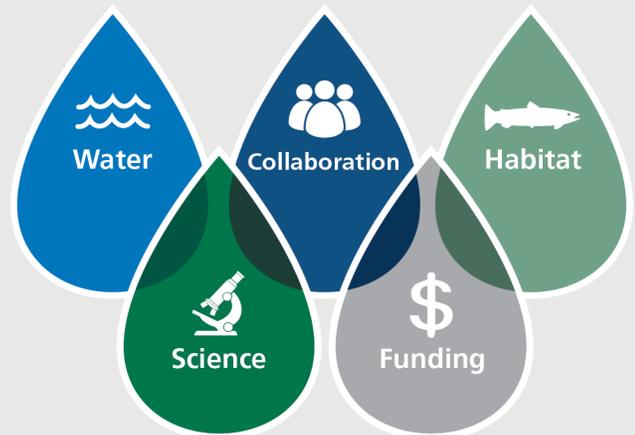
- Up to 50,000 acre-feet in above-normal, below-normal and dry years for additional Delta inflow

#### Enhanced Rearing Habitat

- More than 100 acres of additional habitat in the lower Yuba River
- \$10 million commitment to projects

#### Science Program

- \$7.8 million commitment to science, monitoring and research to inform decision-making





## A Framework for the Yuba River (continued)

During the 15-year term of this agreement, it is estimated the base and supplemental contributions would be provided in about half of those years.

### Enhanced Rearing Habitat

With this voluntary approach, Yuba Water is also partnering with others to develop and improve more than 100 acres of in-channel and floodplain fisheries habitat during the term of the agreement. Yuba Water has also committed to contributing \$10 million over the 15-year term for habitat enhancement measures. The agreement would specify the process for selecting, developing, funding, implementing, operating and maintaining these habitat measures.

### Science Program

Yuba Water will provide \$7.8 million to fund a river science program, at \$520,000 per year, for use in the Yuba River watershed. This program will complement ongoing science studies on the river.

### Public Safety Improvements

In addition to funding the agency's share of habitat improvements and other actions required by the agreement, Yuba Water plans to use the estimated \$80 million in compensation from supplemental water contributions toward regional public safety improvements. One critical infrastructure project this revenue would help fund is a new \$225 million secondary spillway at New Bullards Bar Dam, which will significantly reduce the flood risk to Yuba and Sutter counties and other downstream communities and greatly enhance dam safety.

*"Voluntary agreements to tackle tough water problems have many potential benefits. They tend to get more buy-in than government-imposed regulations, and they can avert protracted and costly litigation. They also can result in more creative approaches."*

- Jeffrey Mount and Ellen Hanak  
Public Policy Institute of California  
CalMatters Commentary, December 2018

### Next Steps

The State Water Board will release a proposed plan and staff report analyzing alternatives later this year for public review and comment. The voluntary agreement participants plan to complete the process of evaluating measures by spring of 2021, so that the voluntary agreement projects could go into effect in 2021. In the interim, Yuba Water is working with the state on plans for the early implementation of the proposed flows.



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