

Collaborative Conservation on the Yuba River

Voluntary Settlement Agreement Proposal

Background

On March 1, California's Department of Water Resources, Department of Fish and Wildlife, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and Sacramento River Basin water agencies provided the State Water Resources Control Board with proposed voluntary settlement agreements that are tailored to meet the needs of the different watersheds feeding into the Bay-Delta. The agreements represent a collaborative plan designed to contribute to the recovery of fish and wildlife species, and are an alternative to the state 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. The purpose of this plan is to establish water quality control measures that provide reasonable protection of beneficial uses in the greater Bay-Delta watershed, which includes all of the Sacramento Valley and portions of the San Joaquin Valley.

A Framework for the Yuba River

Increased Delta inflow

Yuba Water Agency's proposed voluntary agreement includes 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 Agency facilities.

The proposal also includes a supplemental contribution of up to an additional 41,000 acre-feet in those same years, compensated at \$290 per acre-foot, reflecting that this amount would exceed Yuba Water's proportionate share of the contribution for Delta inflow. Yuba Water only diverts about one-third of the water diverted from the Yuba Watershed.

Key Points

Increased Delta inflow

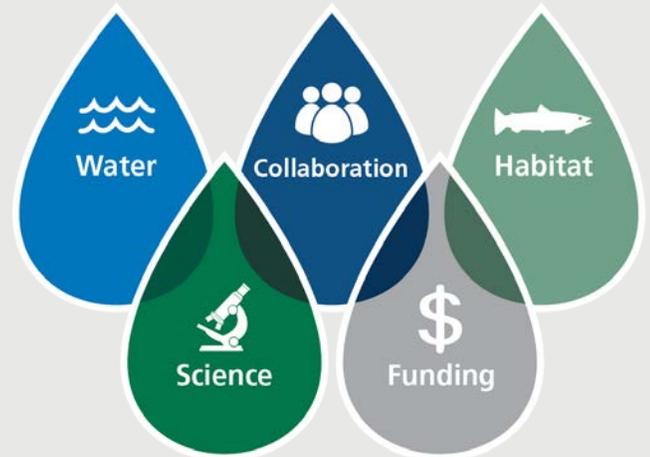
- Up to 50,000 acre-feet in above-normal, below-normal and dry years for additional Delta inflow

Enhanced Rearing Habitat

- 100 acres of additional habitat in the lower Yuba River
- \$10 million Yuba Water commitment

Science Program

- \$7.8 million Yuba Water commitment



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A Framework for the Yuba River (cont'd)

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

This voluntary approach would also include Yuba Water Agency partnering with others in the development and/or improvement of 100 acres of in-channel and floodplain fish habitat during the term of the agreement.

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

Public Safety Improvements

In addition to funding the agency's portion 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 to help pay for public safety improvements.

One critical infrastructure project this would fund is a new \$160 million secondary spillway at New Bullards Bar Dam, which will significantly reduce the flood risk to Yuba and Sutter counties, 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 - Nov. 18, 2018

Next Steps

The State Water Resources Control 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 the end of 2019, so that the voluntary agreement projects could go into effect in 2020.

In the interim, Yuba Water Agency is working with the state on plans for the early implementation of the proposed flows, planned for the spring of 2019.



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