

Overview of the ROC on LTO Biological Opinions

Background

The federal Central Valley Project and the State Water Project provide water for over 25 million Californians and millions of acres of some of the most productive farmland in the world. They also help support important commercial and recreational fisheries, and ensure that many rare and unique species have adequate available water.

On October 21, 2019, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service released their Biological Opinions on the Bureau of Reclamation's new proposed operations for the Central Valley Project. Intertwined and operated alongside the State of California's State Water Project, the CVP is vital to the success of California's economy and environment. Below is a brief description of the Biological Opinions, including how Reclamation's proposed CVP operations plan has evolved after working with the two fisheries agencies to minimize impacts to fisheries and the environment and provide needed water to the State's farms and people.



How Did We Get Here?

In August 2016, the Bureau of Reclamation and the California Department of Water Resources began to develop a new operations plan and undertake a review of the effects of the new plan on numerous species listed for protection under the Endangered Species Act, in particular, delta smelt, green sturgeon, and salmon and steelhead species.

In the new draft plan released in January 2019, Reclamation sought to strike the important balance between providing water supply for farmers and communities, while meeting the needs of fisheries, other species, and their habitats. Their draft plan included a suite of flow (requiring water) and non-flow measures (like habitat restoration) crafted to improve water supply reliability using updated science while being protective of endangered fish species.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service reviewed the new draft plan and worked with Reclamation to modify the proposed operations plan to minimize and offset those impacts. Following robust scientific review, both FWS and NMFS found that Reclamation's revised proposed operations will not jeopardize threatened or endangered species or adversely modify their critical habitat. These findings were reached for several reasons – most notably because of significant investments by many partners in science, habitat restoration, conservation facilities including hatcheries, and protective measures built into the operations plan.

The new operations plan that has emerged includes more nimble and responsive water project operations that both protect endangered fish and allow the flexibility to quickly adapt to changing conditions – like the variable weather in California – to ensure effective and efficient water supply management.

Highlights of the Proposed Ops Plan

The new actions and operations as part of the improved proposed action include:

- An estimated \$1.5 billion investment to support endangered fish over the next 10 years
- A bigger cold-water pool and better cold-water management at the CVP's largest reservoir, Lake Shasta, near Redding
- Smarter Delta operations through real-time adaptive management and greater management oversight of Delta pumping operations informed by updated science
- Significant investments in hatcheries to include funding for a conservation hatchery in the Delta to assist in the recovery of Delta smelt and other species
- A \$14 million investment by Reclamation that will accelerate work underway at Battle Creek and the program to reintroduce winter-run Chinook salmon in the Sacramento River and its tributaries
- A commitment to use the newest science and the latest scientific thinking to ensure Reclamation's updated operations are benefitting fish

