



# Media Release

## **State Water Board initiates public planning process for Bay-Delta Plan updates**

### ***Water Board releases draft report analyzing possible impacts to Sacramento/Delta***

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**SACRAMENTO** – As part of the public process required to update and implement the [San Francisco Bay/Sacramento-San Joaquin Bay-Delta Water Quality Control Plan](#), the State Water Resources Control Board today released a [draft staff report](#) that evaluates environmental and related effects of instream flows and other potential changes to the Sacramento/Delta component of the plan.

The nearly 6,000-page document, which was developed as part of the Sacramento/Delta update process that began in 2012 and incorporates input from multiple public workshops and recent tribal consultations and environmental justice listening sessions, examines a proposal based on a [2018 Framework](#), proposed voluntary agreements, and other alternatives for addressing reasonable protection of water quality and fish and wildlife in the watershed.

Since much of the report was developed before a [memorandum of understanding proposing voluntary agreements](#) was received in 2022, the agreements are analyzed in a separate chapter. The draft report also contains the final draft of the [scientific basis report](#) regarding voluntary agreements that will be submitted to independent peer review, as required by law.

Further, the draft report considers the addition of tribal beneficial uses to the overall Bay-Delta Plan.

The Bay-Delta Plan protects beneficial uses of water (for fish and wildlife, agriculture, or drinking water needs, among others) in the San Francisco Bay-Sacramento/San Joaquin Delta, which provides drinking water to two-thirds of Californians and supplies water to millions of acres of farmland. The watershed also supports 80% of the state's commercial salmon fisheries and is an important habitat for more than 750 animal and plant species, including waterfowl, birds of prey and threatened or endangered fish such as the Delta smelt, Chinook salmon and steelhead.



“This is a milestone in the board’s ongoing efforts to protect the Delta, a vital hub in California’s water supply system, as it continues to confront enormous challenges exacerbated by the impacts of climate change and extreme weather events,” said Eric Oppenheimer, chief deputy director of the State Water Board. “The scope and scale of the report illustrate the complexity of the issues and the considerable analysis necessary to provide a foundation for informed comment and decision-making during the next phase of the Bay-Delta Plan process.”

While the board has not made any decisions regarding possible revisions to the Sacramento/Delta portion of the plan, today’s release of the report starts a public comment period and initiates a formal regulatory planning process that will span several months and include an extensive array of scientific, technical and environmental analyses. Interested parties will be afforded multiple opportunities to ask questions and offer feedback at hearings, workshops and related events, including an additional public comment period on the precise regulatory text for updates to the plan in early-mid 2024.

Due to multiple factors, including the construction of dams and reservoirs, reduced river flows and outflows, loss of aquatic habitat and increasingly frequent drought conditions, the sharp drop in native fish populations that migrate through and inhabit the watershed has brought some species to the edge of extinction.

In response to the deteriorating habitat conditions and declining fish populations, the board updated the Bay-Delta Plan in December 2018 to increase flows in the Lower San Joaquin River, among other actions, and created a framework for potential changes to the Sacramento River/Delta portions of the plan. Currently, the board is considering updates identified in the framework, as well as voluntary agreements water users proposed in 2022 that involve both flow and habitat restoration actions.

During the public comment period, which concludes on Dec. 15, staff plan to hold workshops to explain the draft report and solicit questions. A multi-day hearing before the board – structured like a workshop – will be held in the fall and offer in-person and virtual attendance options. Oral comments will be accepted via both options. Written feedback will be due at the end of the comment period.

After evaluating public feedback on the draft report and peer review input on the science report findings on proposed voluntary agreements, staff will incorporate appropriate changes and release draft plan amendments for public review and comment in early-mid 2024.

*The State Water Board’s mission is to preserve, enhance and restore the quality of California’s water resources and drinking water for the protection of the environment, public health and all beneficial uses, and to ensure proper allocation and efficient use for present and future generations.*