

December 21, 2016

FWS Response to SWG Recommendation

The Smelt Working Group met Monday, December 19 and repeated their recommendation for Action 1 to be implemented as soon as possible with the intent of limiting the distribution of turbidity in the south Delta.

On December 16, Reclamation and DWR updated their planned operations to achieve combined exports of 7000 cfs by Sunday, December 18. This was estimated to result in OMR of -5000cfs to -6000 cfs. This operation is being taken as a preemptive measure by Reclamation and DWR and is not the result of a determination by FWS under the Biological Opinion. As of December 20, Reclamation and DWR indicated their intent to continue this operation at least until Friday, December 23. Reclamation and DWR report that they will continue to assess conditions for the remainder of the week, and if conditions continue to settle following last week's storm, Reclamation and DWR will contemplate increasing exports.

Flows on the Sacramento River at Freeport have receded below 80,000 cfs from a daily peak of around 83,000 cfs on December 18. San Joaquin flows are likewise receding from a peak of around 1,700 cfs over the weekend. There has been no delta smelt salvage reported this season. Turbidity sensors at Bacon Island have been down since December 18 but had reported readings past 10 NTU after Thursday's storm. Turbidity is less than 10 NTU this morning (December 21) in Middle River at Holt. Prisoner's Point turbidity has been 15-16 NTU this week. Holland Cut is at approximately 8 NTU after getting fixed this weekend, and Victoria Canal has not reported any readings past 5 NTU for the week. Turbidity at Clifton Court Forebay has registered 6-7 NTU for most of the past week. DWR turbidity transects from Monday indicate that the turbidity distribution remains in the northern reach of Old River. The Enhanced Delta Smelt Monitoring caught 3 delta smelt in the San Joaquin River last Thursday but did not report any delta smelt from Monday's survey. On Tuesday, 7 delta smelt were caught, 3 in the San Joaquin River and 4 in the low risk, high density zones (Lower Sacramento River, Suisun Bay, Honker Bay). Additional survey results are expected throughout the week.

For the time being, the planned operations appear adequate to avoid turbidity bridges in Old and Middle rivers, with less water supply impact than would have occurred under Action 1. Based on this intended operation and settling conditions in the Delta, the Service does not believe that Action 1 is currently necessary in response to last week's storm. It is still very early in the adult delta smelt salvage season and the Service remains prepared to make a determination under Action 1 of the BiOp if necessary. We will continue to seek recommendations from the Smelt Working Group and monitor conditions, including turbidity, results of the Enhanced Delta Smelt Monitoring, Sacramento River flow levels and other Delta inflows, and salvage. We greatly appreciate the collaborative efforts of the agencies to reduce risk to delta smelt during this ecologically sensitive time.