



American River Group Notes

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Thursday, January 15, 2026

Action Items

1. Reclamation to send the updated 12-month Operations Outlook to K&W for circulation to the ARG.
2. Reclamation to confirm whether the horn heard at Nimbus Dam is associated with flow changes, gate movement, or both.

Introductions

1. USBR: Kevin Thielen, Alexander Vaisvil, Peggy Manza, Mechele Pacheco, Zarela Guerrero, Spencer Marshall, Carolyn Bragg, Brian Willard, Drew Loney
2. NMFS: Paula Higginson, Stephen Maurano
3. USFWS: Erika Holcombe
4. CDFW: Andrew Gaan, Nicolas Bauer, Travis Apgar, Jennifer O'Brien, Erica Meyers, Crystal Rigby, Molly Shea, Emily Fischer
5. SWRCB: Travis Dennis, Nathalie Niepagen
6. Water Districts: N/A
7. City of Sacramento: Ryan Palmer
8. Environmental Council of Sacramento: N/A
9. City of Roseville: N/A
10. Cramer Fish Sciences: Kirsten Sellheim
11. City of Folsom: N/A
12. DWR: John Ford
13. EBMUD: I-Pei Hsiu

14. SMUD: Tyler Belarde
15. PCWA: Benjamin Barker
16. WAPA: Eric Mork
17. SJWD: Greg Zlotnick
18. CVP SOD Ag Districts: N/A
19. Water Forum: Erica Bishop
20. PSMFC: Hunter Morris, Logan Day
21. USACE: Casey Nyquist
22. CBEC Engineering: Chris Hammersmark
23. Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians: N/A
24. CSUS: DeDe Birch
25. BKS Law Firm: Jennifer Buckman
26. Kleinschmidt: N/A
27. Watercourse Engineering: Mike Deas
28. Sunzi Consulting: Yung-Hsin Sun
29. Kearns & West: Karis Johnston, Katy Kennedy, Mia Schiappi
30. Other: N/A

Announcements

- N/A

Housekeeping

- N/A

Operations Forecast

SMUD

1. Recent storms delivered approximately 20 inches of precipitation over a 20-day period, though overall conditions remain below average. As of mid-January, precipitation is approximately 127% of average to date, but only 53.4% of the water-year average. Storms have been warm, resulting in limited snowpack accumulation.

2. Snowpack is currently approximately 50.5% of average to date and 21% of the April 1 average, which is typically peak snowpack. Lower-elevation snow is beginning to melt, contributing to earlier inflows.
3. SMUD is holding more water than typical for this time of year due to uncertainty regarding future snowpack and to ensure sufficient summer storage for hydropower generation and FERC requirements. Forecasts indicate earlier-than-normal runoff followed by below-average spring inflows. Near-term climate outlooks show warmer temperatures with a lower probability of precipitation.

PCWA

1. Storage at French Meadows is approximately 81 thousand acre feet (TAF) and 60% capacity, with strong inflows following recent precipitation. Hell Hole Reservoir storage remains stable, and combined system storage is approximately 217 TAF, about 130% of average.
2. Snow water equivalent in the basin is approximately 8.5 inches, or 40% of average. While precipitation year-to-date is favorable, much of it has fallen as rain rather than snow.
3. PCWA is operating in a conservative mode due to uncertainty for the remainder of the winter and spring. No operational issues were reported.

Central Valley Operations

Reclamation

1. Nimbus Dam releases increased in response to recent storm events and peaked well above median values before being ramped down as forecasts shifted drier. Current releases remain above inflows as Reclamation approaches encroachment management targets.
2. Several recent storm events were over-forecasted, prompting precautionary operational responses that were later adjusted downward. Snowpack remains a concern due to warm storms, though precipitation totals are comparable to wetter years such as 2017 and 2022.
3. Reservoir temperature profiles indicate cool, weakly stratified conditions, with temperatures generally in the low-50s. With shutters now in place, Reclamation does not anticipate any issues similar to last year where debris obstruction delayed the installation of temperature control shutters and resulted in a potential early release of cold water pool.
4. Flood management actions above the MRR began in December and continue. January operations are based on the Sacramento River Index; the American River Index will be used beginning in February. Reclamation will present updated index-based requirements at the next ARG meeting.

5. Reclamation will share an updated 12-month operations outlook with the ARG in the coming days and encouraged members to reach out with questions.

Questions/Comments

1. PCWA asked about the audible horn near Nimbus Dam, and whether it indicated gate movement or flow change.
 - a. Reclamation will confirm whether the horn is associated with flow changes, gate movement, or both.
 - b. Reclamation sent the following message in the meeting teams chat to address the question - "The horn has to sound for any increase when we are below 15,000 cfs and every time a gate is raised. So this would mean any increases to river release, or adjustments to which gate is releasing what volume. e.g. Moving 100 cfs from gate 1 to gate 18 would mean gate 18 would have to open and the horn would need to be used despite no increase to net river release."

Fisheries Update

CDFW Updates

1. Carcass surveys
 - a. Carcass surveys concluded several weeks early due to increased flows. Surveys were conducted over 10 weeks, with a total of 18,541 carcasses processed. Subsampling occurred during peak weeks due to high carcass counts.
 - b. Preliminary egg retention analysis indicates approximately 69% of females were fully spawned, 16% unspawned, and 14% partially spawned. Further analysis is ongoing.
2. Nimbus hatchery operations
 - a. Steelhead releases began on November 10 and 12, 2025. Approximately 360,000 eggs have been collected to date, representing about 90% of the to-date goal. Egg counts will be updated once eggs reach the eyed stage.
 - b. Steelhead spawning began on December 30, 2025. The second half of steelhead releases began this week, with releases split across multiple days.

Water Forum/Cramer Fish Sciences Updates

1. Dissolved oxygen (DO) loggers were removed ahead of recent storm events and have since been reinstalled. DO levels are trending higher, consistent with seasonal destratification, and no water quality concerns were identified.
2. Aerial redd surveys have been completed, with data analysis ongoing. Results are expected later in the spring. Snorkel surveys are scheduled to begin in

February. Pre-project surveys are underway to assess fish distribution in lower river reaches.

Questions/Comments

1. CDFW asked about the potential for surveys to be conducted to monitor potential juvenile fish stranding under current flow conditions.
 - a. Reclamation CVO shared that an emergency contract is being finalized to conduct stranding surveys from late January through March.

PSMFC Updates

1. Rotary screw traps on the American River at Watt Avenue have not been installed due to unresolved funding delays. No estimated installation date is currently available.

Next Meeting

The next regularly scheduled ARG meeting is on Thursday, February 19, 2026.