



American River Group Notes

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Thursday, April 16, 2026

Action Items

1. Reclamation to send the updated 12-month Operations Outlook to K&W for circulation to the ARG.
2. Kearns & West to update the date on the April ARG meeting agenda and send the revised packet to the ARG.
3. Kearns & West coordinate with CDFW to confirm CDFW participation for future ARG meetings.

Introductions

1. USBR: Peggy Manza, Kevin Thielen, Mechele Pacheco, Myrna Giraldo Perez, Zarela Guerrero, Brian Willard, Drew Loney
2. NMFS: Paula Higginson, Carrie Skorocz
3. USFWS: Erika Holcombe
4. CDFW: Crystal Rigby, Elaine Jeu, Andrew Gaan, Jennifer O'Brien, Duane Linander, Travis Apgar, Jason Julienne, Emily Fisher, Nicholas Bauer, Erica Meyers
5. California Department of Parks and Recreation: Mike Howard
6. SWRCB: Travis Dennis
7. Water Districts: N/A
8. City of Sacramento: Brian Sanders
9. Environmental Council of Sacramento: N/A
10. Sacramento Regional Water Authority: N/A
11. City of Roseville: N/A

12. Cramer Fish Sciences: Jamie Sweeney, Kirsten Sellheim
13. City of Folsom: N/A
14. DWR: John Ford, Kevin Reece
15. EBMUD: I-Pei Hsiu
16. SMUD: Megan Peers
17. PCWA: Benjamin Barker, Darin Reintjes
18. WAPA: Eric Mork
19. SJWD: Paul Helliker
20. CVP SOD Ag Districts: N/A
21. Water Forum: Ashlee Casey, Erica Bishop
22. Verdantas: Chris Hammersmark
23. PSMFC: Logan Day, Hunter Morris
24. USACE: Casey Nyquist
25. Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians: N/A
26. Carmichael Water District (CWD): David Biagi
27. CSUS: DeDe Birch
28. BKS Law Firm: Jennifer Buckman
29. Kleinschmidt: Vanessa Martinez
30. Watercourse Engineering: Mike Deas
31. Addley Group: Craig Addley
32. Sunzi Consulting: Yung-Hsin Sun
33. Kearns & West: Karis Johnston, Katy Kennedy
34. Other: Rod Hall

Announcements

- N/A

Housekeeping

- N/A

Operations Forecast

SMUD

1. April precipitation is above average, with water year-to-date precipitation approximately 84% of average.
2. Snowpack is approximately 25% of average to date, reflecting continued impacts of warm temperatures and a rain-dominated winter.
3. Total reservoir storage is above average for this time of year and is expected to fill early due to early-season precipitation and accelerated snowmelt.
4. Releases to the South Fork American River are average in April and are projected to be below average in the coming months due to limited snowpack.

PCWA

1. Reservoir storage is in good condition for this time of year, with combined storage approximately 150% of average, though about 46% of total capacity.
2. Conditions are driven by significant precipitation events in December and January followed by snowmelt in March, with high runoff efficiency due to saturated soils.
3. French Meadows Reservoir is approximately 85% of average; Hell Hole Reservoir is full.
4. Recent operations were impacted by a temporary PG&E transmission-related outage; facilities are returning to normal operations.
5. Recent flows include approximately 2,300 cfs (7-day average) at R11 and approximately 4,350 cfs in the North Fork American River associated with pump storage operations.
6. April B-120 conditions are below normal; therefore, no spring pulse flows are planned. The May 1 B-120 will establish minimum flows and recreational releases through September.
7. Operations are expected to return to typical patterns, though generation may not occur continuously.

Central Valley Operations

Reclamation

1. Hydrologic conditions reflect above-average precipitation overall, but with a shift toward rain rather than snow, resulting in below-average snowpack.
2. Folsom Reservoir storage remains well above average (approximately 129% of average) and is currently operating near the top of the conservation pool while maintaining flood control space.

3. Snowpack conditions are comparable to dry years (e.g., WY 2014), though storage is currently higher due to early-season inflows.
4. March conditions were exceptionally warm and dry, resulting in rapid snowmelt; April precipitation has been slightly above normal but insufficient to offset earlier deficits.
5. Recent flood control operations resulted in releases up to approximately 7,500 cfs, with current releases around 6,500 cfs, roughly matching inflow.
6. Flood control releases approximated a spring pulse flow in April, with flows higher than initially discussed but managed below approximately 8,000 cfs to reduce redd scour risk, where possible, while extending duration.
7. Operations are expected to adjust in the near term depending on forecasted precipitation, with potential reductions in releases.
8. Reservoir temperature profiles indicate early seasonal stratification, with warming observed mid-month followed by recent cooling. Temperature management is expected to be an important topic in upcoming months.
9. Minimum Release Requirements (MRR) for May are expected to set baseline operations for the remainder of the year.
10. No updated 12-month outlook was presented; Reclamation will distribute an updated outlook when available.
11. Reclamation noted increasing coordination needs and interest in developing consistent documentation of operational decisions and associated rationale.

Questions/Comments

1. CDFW requested clarification on why fisheries agencies were not included in discussions related to the pulse flow.
 - a. Reclamation indicated that the fisheries agencies were invited and several members of CDFW attended the pulse flow ad hoc meeting held on 4/1.
 - b. CDFW expressed interest in broader inclusion in future ad hoc coordination meetings.
 - c. Reclamation acknowledged the challenge of coordinating a large group and indicated willingness to improve outreach where feasible.
2. CDFW noted that there was not full consensus on the timing of the spring pulse flow, citing concerns related to steelhead emergence and hatchery fish readiness.
 - a. Reclamation acknowledged differing perspectives. They noted the need for improved documentation of decision-making processes, including alignment with efforts in other forums (e.g., Bay-Delta Office

coordination). Reclamation will circulate a draft document soon on the spring pulse flow for review and input.

3. PSFMC asked about expected fish releases in river during the week of April 20.
 - a. CDFW indicated that no decisions have yet been made on the timing of releases.

Fisheries Update

CDFW Updates

1. No hatchery updates were reported.

PSFMC Updates

1. Rotary screw trap operations began on April 6 with limited staffing.
2. Preliminary data indicate that approximately 80-90% of Chinook passage has already occurred (based on Watt Avenue estimates).
3. Fish size distributions suggest smaller individuals compared to wetter years.
4. Observed declines in catch may reflect reduced sampling efficiency rather than true abundance changes.
5. Additional species observed include juvenile bass and suckers.

Water Forum/Cramer Fish Sciences Updates

1. Dissolved oxygen (DO) conditions remain suitable for salmonids, as is typical for this time of year.
2. Juvenile Chinook salmon and steelhead are present in high numbers throughout the system and are being documented in ongoing snorkel surveys with Water Forum, funded by a WaterSMART grant.
3. Steelhead monitoring indicates approximately 39 redds observed to date, which is low relative to past years.
4. Lamprey presence has been observed in recent surveys, though not consistently across sampling events.
5. Stranding surveys conducted through March identified stranded steelhead, which were returned to the river; consistent stranding has been observed at Paradise Beach and stranding in the lower river has been driven more by Sacramento flows this year due to backwatering into the American River during high flow events.
6. Some redds were identified as shallow or at risk of dewatering earlier in the season.
7. Emergence modeling indicates that many embryos from earlier spawning events were near or at emergence during the spring pulse flow, reducing risk.

8. To inform anticipated flood releases, Reclamation requested rapid technical input on steelhead redd locations and potential hydraulic impacts due to high velocity flood releases on potentially un-emerged steelhead redds, from Water Forum and their consultant team. Redd scour risk was evaluated using previous hydraulic model output, incorporating depth and velocity, and redd observation and emergence timing, to assess potential impacts from elevated flows. This request for input was not part of a formal consultation.
9. Historically, Water Forum has provided similar assessments for Reclamation/ARG associated with potential redd dewatering during drier years when lower flows have occurred during spring. Redd dewatering potential analysis was underway when spring storm events necessitated a shift in information to possibly accommodate higher flows. It was noted that there was not sufficient time to provide substantial input.

Spring Pulse Flow Discussion

1. Reclamation summarized the April pulse flow event, noting that flows reached approximately 7,500 cfs, higher than initially discussed (~3,200 cfs) in the 4/1 ad hoc pulse flow meeting, but were managed below thresholds associated with potential redd scour risk. Flow magnitude and duration were adjusted to balance flood control requirements with fisheries considerations.
2. CDFW expressed concern regarding timing, particularly related to:
 - a. Steelhead emergence timing
 - b. Potential stranding risks
 - c. Hatchery fish not being ready for release
3. CDFW noted that hatchery fish size is often used as a proxy for in-river fish readiness, suggesting that earlier timing may not have aligned with optimal outmigration conditions.
4. Reclamation highlighted tradeoffs between operational constraints and biological objectives. Reclamation indicated that additional documentation will be developed to describe the decision-making process for the pulse flow, including consideration of differing agency perspectives.

Next Meeting

The next regularly scheduled ARG meeting is on Thursday, May 21, 2026.