



American River Group Notes

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Thursday, November 21, 2025

Action Items

Kearns & West

1. Share draft ARG Water Year 2026 activities schedule and outline with the ARG

Introductions

1. USBR: Brian Willard, Kevin Thielen, Zarela Guerrero, Mechele Pacheco, Spencer Marshall, Randi Field, Brian Mahardja
2. NMFS: Stephen Maurano, Paula Higginson
3. USFWS: Craig Anderson
4. CDFW: Nicholas Bauer, Emily Fisher, Jennifer O'Brien, Travis Apgar, Duane Linander, Molly Shea, Andrew Gaan
5. SWRCB: Nathalie Niepagen
6. Water Districts: N/A
7. City of Sacramento: Brian Sanders, 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: Megan Peers
15. PCWA: Benjamin Barker

16. WAPA: Eric Mork, Robert Delizo
17. SJWD: Greg Zlotnick
18. CVP SOD Ag Districts: Tom Boardman
19. Water Forum: Erica Bishop, Ashlee Casey
20. PSMFC: Logan Day, Hunter Morris
21. USACE: N/A
22. CBEC Engineering: Chris Hammersmark
23. Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians: N/A
24. CSUS: DeDe Birch
25. BKS Law Firm: N/A
26. Kleinschmidt: Vanessa Martinez
27. Watercourse Engineering: Mike Deas
28. Sunzi Consulting: Yung-Hsin Sun
29. Kearns & West: Mia Schiappi, Katy Kennedy
30. Other: Rod Hall

Announcements

1. Gary Novak will retire at the end of the month. The ARG expressed appreciation for his 20+ years of service.

Housekeeping

1. N/A

Operations Forecast

SMUD

1. Recent storms resulted in 123% of average precipitation to date. Storms were warm and did not have a significant impact on snowpack, currently at 24% average to date.
2. Storage levels remain close to last year at this time; Union Valley Reservoir will release from storage and may bring the system to average depending on additional storms.
3. Forecasts for the South Fork remain around average; flows are expected to be higher than average in December.

PCWA

1. Storage at French Meadows Reservoir is currently 76 thousand acre feet (TAF), or 56% capacity. Communications issues are being resolved, with a satellite installation planned next week to improve reliability.
2. Storage at Hell Hole Reservoir is currently 101 TAF, or 49% capacity.
3. Estimated 8,000 AF of inflow during recent events, though most moved quickly through the system. Flows have maintained around 800 cubic feet per second (cfs); combined storage is tracking to 150 AF by the end of December.
4. Total combined storage is currently 177 TAF, or 52% capacity.
5. Middle Fork releases are at 740 cfs, and will likely continue through November and December; generation is expected to increase.
6. Precipitation is at 121% of average, though there has been minimal snowpack accumulation.

Central Valley Operations

USBR

1. Nimbus flows remain slightly above the minimum release requirement (MRR) for November.
2. Folsom Reservoir storage levels are above average and continue to increase with above-average precipitation so far.
3. Warm storms contributed to high rainfall but there was limited snowpack accumulation; the basin snow pillow shows 55% of average.
4. Folsom Reservoir gained storage from the 11/17/25 storm. Local flow into Lake Natoma allowed for a few day period where Folsom releases decreased with no change in Nimbus Dam releases to the Lower American River.
5. Storage at Folsom Reservoir is expected to continue increasing in coming days.
6. Reclamation Central Valley Office is working with the Water Forum on dissolved oxygen (DO) monitoring in the Lower American River during the power-bypass.
7. October atmospheric and water temperatures remained well below seasonal targets throughout the month. The temperature target shifted on 11/1/25; several early-November days exceeded the updated water temperature target due to warmer-than-normal atmospheric conditions.
8. Late-November cooling is expected, and reservoir stratification continues; continued cooling should support meeting downstream temperature objectives after the power-bypass ends.

9. October Nimbus releases were slightly above MRR but remained below long-term average flows. A new MRR will be issued in January based on the SRI.
10. Both 90% and 50% exceedance forecasts made earlier in the month underestimated actual conditions. Reclamation expects actual Folsom Storage conditions for the end of November will be higher than in the shared projections.

Questions/Comments

1. WAPA asked when the temperature bypass started at Folsom.
 - a. Reclamation shared that the power bypass started on October 21 and will end on November 21. There have been no deviations from the schedule.

Fisheries Update

CDFW Updates

1. Carcass surveys
 - a. Surveys began on 10/14/25 and are currently in week 6.
 - b. Carcass observations have increased substantially in recent weeks.
 - c. Spatial distribution to date: 46% in upstream reaches, 31% in Section 1B, 22% in Section 2, and less than 1% downstream.
 - d. Based on 385 females assessed, female egg retention is 12.6% unspawned and 15.9% partially spawned.
 - e. Compared to historical datasets (including high year 2013 and lower-count years 2016-2017), 2025 carcass counts are tracking higher than most recent years, second only to 2013.
2. Redd surveys
 - a. First survey documented 9 redds. As of 11/19, approximately 1,800 redds observed, compared to 1,600 total for last season.
 - b. Peak has not yet been confirmed; numbers may continue to rise.
3. Nimbus hatchery operations
 - a. Approximately half of the brood year Chinook have been released; remaining fish are in raceways for a January release.
 - b. Chinook spawning began on 11/10.
 - c. Production goal is over 8 million eggs, including the 3.5 million for early-fry releases.

- d. As of Monday, 11/17/25, 1.5 million eggs have been collected; about 100 females spawned on 11/20/25.
- e. Trap data indicate an unusually high proportion of grilse, particularly jacks.

Questions

1. CDFW asked whether comparable redd count data were available for the Mokelumne or Upper Sacramento rivers.
 - a. CDFW responded that Mokelumne redd counts are in the mid-100s, substantially lower than the Lower American River, and they did not have current Upper Sacramento numbers. Lower pulse flows and reduced attraction flows on the Mokelumne this year may have contributed to the lower counts; additional insight may come once coded-wire tag data are processed.
 - b. EBMUD noted that total Chinook passage to date is 9,784. Despite signs of physiological strain on returning fish, substantial numbers are still entering river systems.
 - c. USFWS shared that Water Forum will do aerial redd survey flights this year. The first flight occurred on 11/19/25, with three total flights planned; results will be provided once available.
2. USFWS asked why steelhead were observed moving upstream in the fish ladder.
 - a. CDFW explained that this behavior is typical; hatchery-origin steelhead sometimes enter the ladder before circling back downstream after release through the river tube.

Cramer Fish Sciences Updates

1. DO levels reflect the power bypass pattern over the last week. DO levels have increased while temperatures have decreased; turbine operations directly influence DO levels.
2. Monitoring at Lake Natoma shows good DO conditions in the Basin during the bypass period; pre-bypass observations indicated low DO over the Nimbus spawning riffle.
3. Vertical profile sensors show low DO at the bottom of Lake Natoma; additional DO surveys are scheduled for this week.
4. Significant numbers of redds and eggs are present in the Nimbus Basin riffle, making DO conditions a priority.
5. Aerial survey was conducted 11/19; data will be provided once processed.

PSMFC Updates

1. Preparing for the 2026 juvenile monitoring season; screw-trap operations are scheduled to begin in January 2026.
2. Crew hiring and gear procurement is underway.
3. 2025 data have been posted and draft annual reports are being finalized for publication on CalFish.

Discussion

ARG Water Year 2026 Activities Schedule (Spencer Marshal)

1. Shared the draft WY2026 ARG activities schedule and report outline.
2. Structure and content remain consistent with the prior year.
3. Draft materials will be distributed to ARG members early next month for review and comment.

Next Meeting

The next regularly scheduled ARG meeting is on Thursday, December 18.