



American River Group Notes

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Webinar: Join Microsoft Teams Meeting

Thursday, December 19, 2024

Action Items

CDFW

1. Add a column showing percentages to the carcass survey table.

USBR

2. Share the signed Record of Decision (ROD) with the ARG once it is available.

Kearns & West

1. Add an agenda item for January to discuss operational changes resulting from the new ROD.

Introductions

1. USBR: Thomas Patton, Liz Kiteck, Zarela Guerrero, Spencer Marshall, Drew Loney, Mechele Pacheco, Myrna Giraldo Perez,
2. NMFS: Barb Byrne, Rachael Alcala, Robert Sheffer, Sam Pyros
3. USFWS: Gabriela Dunn, Paul Cadrett
4. CDFW: Emily Fisher, Jason Julianne, Jennifer O'Brien, Nick Bauer, Crystal Rigby, Erica Meyers, Travis Apgar, Gary Novak,
5. DWR: Mike Ford
6. SWRCB: Claudia Bucheli, Natalie Niepagen
7. California State Parks: N/A
8. EBMUD: I-Pei Hsiu
9. City of Sacramento: Ryan Palmer
10. Sacramento County: N/A

11. Environmental Council of Sacramento: N/A
12. City of Folsom: N/A
13. City of Roseville: N/A
14. Cramer Fish Sciences: Kirsten Sellheim, Jamie Sweeney
15. PCWA: Ben Barker
16. PSMFC: Logan Day
17. SMUD: N/A
18. USACE: N/A
19. cbec Eco Engineering: Chris Hammersmark
20. Water Forum: Ashlee Casey, Erica Bishop
21. Water Districts: N/A
22. Regional Water Authority (RWA): N/A
23. Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians: N/A
24. CSUS: Dede Birch
25. Kleinschmidt Group: N/A
26. WAPA: N/A
27. BKS Law Firm: Jennifer Buckman

Announcements

- As of 12/19/2024, there is the possibility of a federal government shutdown on Monday, 12/23/2024. If it does occur, there may be a delay in responses from federal agency employees.

Housekeeping

- N/A

Fisheries Update

CDFW Updates

1. Carcass Surveys
 - a. Lower American River (LAR) carcass surveys are currently in their 10th week. The first five weeks were slow in carcass-count accumulation but have picked up since late November.

- b. Through 12/13/2024, 10,505 carcasses have been processed. This is approximately 4,100 fewer carcasses than this time last year. Of the carcasses processed in 2024:
 - i. 52% were found in the range between Nimbus Basin and Sunrise Blvd.
 - ii. 24% were found between Sunrise Blvd and El Manto Dr.
 - iii. 18% were found between El Manto Dr and River Bend Park.
 - iv. 6% were found between River Bend Park and Watt Ave.
- 2. Chinook spawning
 - a. As of 12/13/2024, 1,190 females were assessed for spawn status.
 - i. 81% of those were classified as Spawned
 - ii. 12% were classified as Unspawned
 - iii. 7% were classified as Partially Spawned
- 3. Redd surveys
 - a. Surveys started at the end of October.
 - b. As of 12/11/2024, 1,279 redds have been observed this season.
 - c. CDFW anticipates that redd surveys are at near-peak levels as of the week of 12/9/2024.
- 4. Nimbus Hatchery Operations Update
 - a. Chinook salmon spawning concluded on 12/12/2024.
 - b. Hatchery fish spawned over 10.9 million eggs (96% of CDFW's collection goal for the season). This total includes:
 - i. Over 8.5 million eggs that were collected to meet mitigation and climate change resiliency goals;
 - ii. Nearly 2.4 million eggs collected for CDFW's parentage-based tagging fry release to be conducted this water year.
 - c. Steelhead spawning is scheduled to begin on 12/31/2024.

Questions

- 1. NMFS asked if the proportion of unspawned females is decreasing with the improvement in water temperatures. If this is the case, could a statistic be included in future updates to depict this proportion?
 - a. CDFW confirmed that they will provide a more detailed statistic for these data points starting in January.

2. NMFS asked about a request from the Merced Hatchery for eggs from Nimbus Hatchery. Does the collection goal for Nimbus include this request, or would it require additional spawning to be done?
 - a. CDFW responded that Merced will be collecting around 1 million dyed eggs from Nimbus. CDFW collects approximately double the number of eggs needed because historically, survival can be as low as 39%. The table shown in the ARG meeting handout does not account for two extra spawns that were done to support Coleman Hatchery. The eggs going to Merced are excess eggs from the regular spawning schedule that would have been discarded otherwise.

Cramer Fish Sciences Updates

1. LAR Spawning Surveys
 - a. Cramer Fish Sciences (Cramer) completed their third survey during the week of 12/2/2024.
 - b. A total of 1,059 redds have been observed.
 - c. Spawning is primarily occurring in the upper reaches of the LAR with the majority at the lower Sailor Bar project reach.
 - d. Cramer is currently conducting their fourth survey.
 - e. Redd steelhead surveys will begin in January.
 - f. Snorkel surveys will begin in February for restoration site effectiveness monitoring.

Questions

1. N/A

PSMFC Updates

1. PSMFC is planning to install two rotary screw traps (RSTs) between January 2-3 with sampling scheduled to begin on 1/5/2025.

Operations Forecast

SMUD

1. December 2024 precipitation totals 3.06 inches through 12/16/2024. Average December precipitation is 9.14 inches.
2. Precipitation totals for WY 2025 are 8.54 inches, or 57.4% of average to date.
3. Total reservoir storage is nearly 62.2% full at approximately 236 TAF.
4. Snowpack is 81.9% of average at selected snow sensors.

5. Chili Bar daily average releases are forecasted at the following flow rates:
 - a. December: 337 cfs
 - b. January: 616 cfs
 - c. February: 675 cfs
6. SMUD's current hydro-release strategy is focused on meeting FERC release requirements at Chili Bar and managing any inflows from future storms.

Questions/Comments

1. N/A

PCWA

1. Storage at French Meadows is currently 60.5 TAF, or 44% capacity.
2. Storage at Hell Hole is currently 74.5 TAF, or 36% capacity.
3. Combined storage totals 135 TAF, or 39% capacity. This represents 80% of the 15-year average.
4. Middle Fork American River (MFAR) daily average releases are approximately 425 cfs.
5. North Fork American River (NFAR) daily average releases are approximately 875 cfs.
6. Total precipitation for Lake Spaulding during WY25 through 12/16/2024 was 19.91 inches, or 106% of average.
7. PCWA is operating in storage conservation mode.

Questions/Comments

1. N/A

Central Valley Operations

USBR

1. The northern part of CA has received the majority of the precipitation that has recently moved through the area.
2. There is a possibility that Central CA will receive precipitation by the end of the year.
3. USBR does not anticipate needing to make flood releases in the near future.
4. Folsom Reservoir releases are at approximately 2,000 cfs to meet the Minimum Release Requirements (MRR) of 2,000 cfs for December.

5. Folsom storage levels are approximately 300 TAF as of 12/17/2024.
6. Accumulated inflow at Folsom is 147 TAF, or 59% of the 15-year average.
7. In late November, USBR reduced spill at Nimbus Dam and reduced a Folsom bypass. Currently, all flows are going through the powerhouse.
8. The shutters remain in the following positions:
 - a. Top shutters: Units 1-3 are raised;
 - b. Middle shutters: Units 1 – 3 are raised;
 - c. Bottom shutters: Units 1 – 3 are raised.
9. At the 50% exceedance operations forecasts, the monthly American River release levels are anticipated to be 2,000 cfs for December, 1,750 cfs for January, and 3,500 cfs for February.
10. At the 90% exceedance operations forecasts, the monthly American River release levels are anticipated to be 2,000 cfs for December, 1,400 cfs for January and 1,400 cfs for February.

Questions/Comments

1. NMFS asked about the precipitation levels at Blue Canyon, which are at 120% of average as of 12/17/2024, and if that is due to the condition of upstream reservoirs, if its more due to dry soil that has absorbed nearly all precipitation, or if it's primarily in snow form that won't be seen in the reservoirs for a while.
 - a. USBR responded that it's likely a combination of all of those elements. The storms that have passed through the area have been a little cooler in temperature and much of the precipitation fell on the Interstate 80 north corridor. There have been major differences in precipitation between Northern and Southern California.
2. CDFW noted that they observed redds in the LAR at temperatures above the 56°F target; this is where they saw egg mortality happening. The number of eggs lost is unknown, but some were seen in late October when the temperatures were above 56°F.

Discussion

1. CDFW asked about planning for potential changes once the Record of Decision (ROD) is signed on 12/20/2024.
 - a. NMFS offered to share what was included in the new Biological Opinion (BiOp), but acknowledged that it might be early to discuss before the new ROD is signed on 12/20/2024. NMFS added the following information from the Proposed Action (PA):

- i. According to the PA, the forecast will be calculated based on the 90% exceedance forecast, versus the 75% exceedance in January and the 50% exceedance during other months, shown in the table shared by USBR at the December ARG meeting. This difference represents a significant change.
 - ii. A second change is that when a spring pulse flow is triggered, that flow volume will not be omitted from the MRR, therefore water will be removed from the river rather than added.
- b. USBR recommended adding an agenda item for January to walk through any differences.
- c. USBR also offered to share the new ROD with the ARG to review once it is signed.
- 2. CDFW asked if flow change notifications will continue to be distributed to the ARG in the instance of a government shutdown.
 - a. USBR responded that they plan to still operate as usual regardless of a potential shutdown interruption.

Annual Report

- 1. N/A

Next Meeting

The next regularly scheduled ARG meeting is on Thursday, January 16. The meeting will be virtual.

In the instance of a federal government shutdown that stretches into January, Kearns & West will coordinate with ARG agencies on whether to meet and which updates can be provided to the group.