



American River Group Notes

Conference Line: +1 (321) 209-6143; Access Code: 596 336 817#

Webinar: [Join the meeting now](#)

Thursday, May 21, 2026

Action Items

Kearns & West to distribute an updated ARG meeting packet.

All ARG members to send comments on the Draft 2026 Temperature Management Plan to Kearns & West and Kevin Thielen.

Introductions

1. USBR: Kevin Thielen, Carolyn Bragg, Joshua Israel, Drew Loney, Tony Yang, Mechele Pacheco, Thomas Patton, Zarela Guerrero, Myrna Giraldo Perez, Brian Willard
2. NMFS: Paula Higginson, Carrie Skorcz
3. USFWS: Craig Anderson, Erika Holcombe
4. CDFW: Elaine Jeu, Crystal Rigby, Emily Fisher, Nicholas Bauer, Travis Apgar, Andrew Gaan, Jason Julianne, Jennifer O'Brien
5. California Department of Parks and Recreation: N/A
6. SWRCB: Nathalie Niepagen
7. Water Districts: N/A
8. City of Sacramento: Ryan Palmer
9. Environmental Council of Sacramento: N/A
10. Sacramento Regional Water Authority: Michelle Banonis
11. City of Roseville: N/A
12. Cramer Fish Sciences (CFS): Jamie Sweeney, Kirsten Sellheim
13. City of Folsom: N/A
14. DWR: N/A

15. EBMUD: I-Pei Hsiu
16. SMUD: Tyler Belarde
17. PCWA: Benjamin Barker, Ben Ransom
18. WAPA: Eric Mork
19. SJWD: Greg Zlotnick
20. CVP SOD Ag Districts: N/A
21. Water Forum: Chris Hammersmark, Ashlee Casey
22. PSMFC: Hunter Morris
23. USACE: N/A
24. CBEC Engineering: N/A
25. Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians: N/A
26. Carmichael Water District (CWD): David Biagi
27. CSUS: N/A
28. BKS Law Firm: Jennifer Buckman
29. Kleinschmidt: N/A
30. Watercourse Engineering: Stacy Tanaka
31. Sunzi Consulting: N/A
32. Other: Paul Helliker
33. Kearns & West: Karis Johnston, Katy Kennedy, Mia Schiappi

Announcements

- N/A

Housekeeping

- N/A

Operations Forecast

SMUD

1. Precipitation remains slightly below average for this time of year, though conditions are improved relative to last year. Runoff to date is approximately comparable to Water Year 2025.

2. Snowpack conditions remain extremely poor, with snow water equivalent approximately 15.2% of average to date and approximately 6% of the April 1 average. Only one snow sensor, located near 8,750 feet elevation, still contains measurable snowpack.
3. Due to the limited snowpack and anticipated reduced late-season runoff, reservoirs have been maintained at elevated storage levels to preserve water supply flexibility through the summer.
4. Most reservoirs are near full capacity, though Ice House Reservoir remains below preferred storage levels and is not expected to fully refill this year.
5. Runoff occurred earlier than the historical average pattern and is receding earlier than normal.
6. August release projections currently include a potential increase associated with anticipated summer energy demand and pricing conditions, though operations remain subject to change depending on weather and power system needs.

PCWA

1. French Meadows Reservoir storage is approximately 93% of average, and Hell Hole Reservoir is approximately 96% full. Combined project storage is approximately 326 thousand acre-feet (TAF) out of 324 TAF capacity, or roughly 122% of historical average.
2. The watershed remains saturated following winter storm events, and inflows continue despite the limited remaining snowpack. Water Year 2026 operations have been challenging due to early snowmelt in March and winter storms characterized by higher temperatures and rapid runoff conversion.
3. Current inflows into Hell Hole Reservoir are approximately 200 cubic feet per second (cfs) combined.
4. French Meadows Powerhouse has been offline during May and is expected to return to service on May 31 to facilitate transfers from French Meadows into Hell Hole.
5. Runoff timing this year was described as “backwards,” with significant runoff occurring in March through May followed by rapidly diminishing snowpack conditions.
6. PCWA noted that almost all reservoirs statewide are currently above average for this time of year.
7. The 7-day average flow below Oxbow is approximately 830 cfs, while flows at American River Pump Station are approximately 3,000 cfs.
8. Recreation release schedules have been finalized and will continue through the summer season.

- a. Weekday recreation releases are scheduled from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.
 - b. Weekend recreation releases are scheduled from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.
 - c. Beginning July 1, Class IV boating flows of approximately 800 cfs will occur every Saturday for approximately five hours beginning at 3:00 a.m.
9. PCWA anticipates moderate releases during June and higher recreation releases during July.

Central Valley Operations

Reclamation

1. Hydrologic conditions continue to reflect above-average storage conditions despite significantly below-average snowpack.
2. March conditions were especially warm and dry, resulting in rapid snowmelt and accelerated depletion of basin snowpack.
3. April precipitation helped improve runoff conditions somewhat but primarily contributed to flood control releases rather than long-term cold-water storage preservation.
4. Folsom Reservoir remained in encroachment conditions for approximately three months before exiting encroachment on May 18.
5. Current operations are focused on balancing storage preservation with anticipated future Delta outflow requirements and salinity obligations.
6. Nimbus releases are decreasing towards Minimum Release Requirements (MRR) in an effort to preserve storage for later in the season.
7. The May 1 90% exceedance hydrologic forecast continues to project below-average runoff into Folsom Reservoir despite relatively high current storage conditions.
8. Reservoir temperature profiles indicate increasing thermal stratification and warming in upper reservoir layers, with additional surface mixing observed during recent wind events. Additional thermistor monitoring equipment has been deployed to better evaluate temporal thermal distribution and reservoir mixing dynamics through the summer.
9. Reclamation noted that current conditions reflect an unusual combination of relatively high storage and limited cold-water inflows due to poor snowpack conditions.

10. MRR for the remainder of the year has been set as outlined in the ARG handouts. The MRR for May is 1,082 cfs.

Fisheries Update

CDFW Updates

1. No updates were reported.

PSFMC Updates

1. Rotary screw trap operations began in April.
2. Current trap catches are approximately 7-10 Chinook salmon per day.
3. Most captured fish are approximately 70-90 mm in length.
4. Some juvenile Chinook are beginning to exhibit signs of smoltification, including scale loss.
5. Declining river flows may require temporary reductions in trapping efforts or operation of a single trap, though sampling will continue as conditions allow.

Water Forum/Cramer Fish Sciences Updates

1. Dissolved oxygen (DO) conditions declined during the recent heatwave and temporarily fell below requirements near Watt Avenue.
2. CFS noted that DO conditions are expected to decline further as flows decrease and water temperatures increase later in the season.
3. Chinook salmon continue to be observed throughout the system during snorkel surveys.
4. *O. mykiss* observations have increased seasonally, though distributions remain patchier than Chinook salmon observations.
5. Steelhead surveys have concluded for the year, with approximately 39 steelhead observed, the second-lowest annual count recorded during the monitoring program.
6. Lamprey were observed during March surveys.
7. Most spawning activity has been observed within side-channel habitats.
8. May 1 stranding surveys identified localized stranding near Sailor Bar, with three fish mortalities documented.

Draft 2026 Temperature Management Plan (TMP)

TMP Overview

1. Reclamation reviewed the draft 2026 American River Temperature Management Plan (TMP), which tentatively proposes implementation of Automated Temperature Selection Procedure (ATSP) Schedule 45.

2. The proposed ATSP 45 schedule includes the following target temperatures:
 - a. 68°F in May
 - b. 69°F from June through September
 - c. 68°F in October
 - d. 59°F in November
3. Updated modeling using the May 18 reservoir profile and final May 1 operations outlook produced warmer projected conditions using the iterative CE-QUAL-W2 modeling framework than earlier draft modeling runs.
4. Under updated modeling:
 - a. The 2020 meteorology iterative run increased from ATSP 51 to ATSP 55.
 - b. The 2017 meteorology iterative run increased from ATSP 39 to ATSP 43.
5. Reclamation anticipates continued evaluation of potential cold-water power bypass operations during the fall.

Questions/Comments

1. Water Forum expressed concern regarding projected July releases and associated river temperature impacts and requested clarification regarding timelines for additional modeling discussions and operational evaluations.
 - a. Reclamation indicated that:
 - i. Comments and requests for alternative model runs would ideally be submitted by June 1.
 - ii. Additional analyses or modeling inputs should be submitted by June 8 where possible.
 - iii. The Final TMP is anticipated by June 15, pending management review.
2. CDFW expressed concern regarding projected warm water conditions and potential impacts on fall-run Chinook salmon health and spawning success. They emphasized the importance of planning ahead for potential a fall power bypass given the current forecast.
3. Water Forum, BKS Law Firm, and others expressed concern regarding the relationship between Delta operational demands, allocations, and downstream temperature management constraints.
 - a. Participants noted concern that operational allocations may not be supportable under current hydrologic and thermal conditions.

Questions were raised regarding whether tradeoffs had been made between water allocations and downstream temperature management objectives.

- b. Reclamation acknowledged concerns regarding temperature management risks and operational tradeoffs, noting that many operational constraints are fixed. Reclamation stated that they are open to reviewing external analyses or modeling scenarios submitted by stakeholders. External analyses may be included as appendices to the TMP without formal endorsement by Reclamation.
- 4. Water Forum noted concern that updated modeling appeared warmer than reflected in the proposed ATSP 45 schedule under the Draft TMP Modeling. They stated that summertime temperatures could potentially exceed 70°F during portions of the management season if further updates indicated warmer ATSP Schedules were needed. They also noted that a fall power bypass may provide some cooling benefit but may still leave temperatures within biologically stressful ranges for fish populations.
- 5. Reclamation stated that a fall power bypass is increasingly likely, though final management confirmation is still pending. Reclamation clarified that there is currently no formal “carryover cold-water pool” policy guiding bypass decisions. Fall operational decisions will depend on updated reservoir temperature profiles and cold-water pool conditions later in the season.
- 6. Reclamation requested that comments be submitted to both Kevin and the Kearns & West team.
 - a. Tracked changes, Word documents, and bullet-point comments are all acceptable formats.
 - b. Additional ad hoc ARG meetings may be scheduled if conditions warrant further discussion.

Next Meeting

The next regularly scheduled ARG meeting is on Thursday, June 18, 2026.