

Smelt Monitoring Team – Tuesday, November 24, 2020

Participants

- CDFW
- DWR
- NMFS
- SWRCB
- USBR
- USFWS
- Kearns & West

Actions Items

- SMT members to provide comments on the notes and ITP risk assessment by Monday 11/30 at noon.
- SMT members to provide any additional feedback on SMT data sources to USBR by COB Friday (11/27).
- SMT members to email KW to share perspectives on the utility of the X2 tool to SMT decision-making and whether their agency is willing and able to provide the resources needed to validate it.

Meeting Summary

1. Agenda Review, Logistics, & Housekeeping

The facilitator noted that Thursday and Friday are holidays for at least some of the SMT members; everyone agreed to finalize comments on the notes and ITP risk assessment by Monday (11/30) at noon in acknowledgement of the holiday.

CDFW shared that the LTO Coordination group has agreed on revisions to the OMR Guidance Document. CDFW was not sure when the finalized document will be shared, but the SMT will begin to implement the new meeting approach on 12/1. 12/1 will also mark the beginning of relevant conditions of approval under the ITP and triggers under the federal proposed action.

USBR answered a question asked at the 11/17 meeting: San Luis Reservoir values are not being included in the Outlook to keep the Outlook focused on only the most relevant locations for decision-making.

2. Relevant Actions & Triggers

USBR stated that there are currently no relevant actions or triggers for Delta Smelt. The First Flush Protective Measure will be activated at the onset of OMR management on 12/1.

CDFW noted that 12/1 will mark the start of the ITP's first flush condition of approval for Delta Smelt, as well as the need to consider adult Longfin Smelt protections. Condition of Approval 8.1.5.2 is currently in effect and requires weekly risk assessments be conducted for Delta Smelt and Longfin Smelt.

3. Current Operations & Outlook

USBR and DWR shared operations updates from the Outlook. Their observations included:

- USBR CVO noted that they anticipate cutting releases from Keswick Dam to the Sacramento River from 4,000 cfs to 3,800 cfs later this week and then holding at that release rate.
- CVO stated that the temporary power bypass releases on the American River for downstream temperature compliance will end on 11/25 – 11/26. River water temperatures are currently at 56° F, which meets the temperature compliance criteria.
- CVO does not anticipate changes in Delta pumping.
- The Delta cross-channel gates will open tomorrow (11/25), be open through the holiday and weekend, and then close on 12/1 and remain closed until mid-May 2021 as described in the PA.
- DWR reported that exports are currently 3,000 cfs; they had been between 2,000 cfs and 2,500 cfs before that, and DWR anticipates they will be closer to 2,000 cfs going forward. The exact value will depend on water quality: if water quality gets better, exports could be increased, but if it get worse, DWR will need to decrease exports.
- Delta outflows are around 4,500 cfs and are anticipated to remain between 4,000 and 4,500 cfs for the next couple of weeks (Required monthly average Delta outflow is 4,500 cfs for November and December in a dry water year).
- Daily OMR is -3,500 cfs and should remain around that number given the expected stability of operations.

4. Review of Environmental Conditions and Survey Updates

CDFW shared survey updates.

- No Delta Smelt or Longfin Smelt were caught on the last day of the November FMWT (11/17). For the month of November, zero Delta Smelt and seven Longfin Smelt were caught (all in the first week).
- The December FMWT and Bay Study surveys commence next Monday (11/30).

USFWS reported on EDSM.

- Zero Delta Smelt were detected last week (11/16-11/19), so there was no abundance estimate generated. Three Longfin Smelt were caught last Tuesday (11/17) in Suisun Marsh.
- EDSM is sampling Monday through Wednesday and Friday this week. There were no Delta or Longfin Smelt caught yesterday (11/23) and USFWS has received no updates of catch today (11/24/20).
- EDSM begins Phase 1 sampling next Monday, November 30. EDSM adds the Southern Delta back into the sampling frame during Phase 1. EDSM will sample at 5-6 random sites per week in the Southern Delta strata.

USBR noted that in the Outlook table of Delta Smelt survey detections, they have been asked to put zeros where no fish were detected and to indicate if there are regions of the Delta not being sampled within the seven-day interval between meetings. CDFW and FWS indicated that most surveys sample the full region within the seven-day period, except for the FMWT which is on a two week-cycle. Staff committed to identifying any future instances where surveys get cancelled due to weather or COVID, thereby eliminating results from a region of the Delta.

CDFW provided a salvage update (11/16-11/22).

- No salvage of Delta Smelt or Longfin Smelt.
- There were no power outages or stoppage in pumping or salvage counts during this period.

- There were no reported reduced counts at either fish salvage facility.

USBR shared water quality data (three-station average daily water temperature as of 11/24 was 12.31°C; three-day average flow at Freeport was 9,371 cfs; turbidity was 3.33 FNU) and the seven-day weather forecast for Antioch (clear and sunny to partly cloudy with winds 11 to 16 mph).

5. Risk Assessment Questions for Weekly Evaluation of Delta Smelt

Based on feedback from USBR management about improving the specificity of the language, USBR staff proposed some small adjustments to their draft answers. For instance, it was recommended that since the "first flush" action cannot be triggered until 12/1, the language should focus on turbidity and flow. SMT members agreed that the answers to the risk assessment questions from last week, along with the small revisions, are still appropriate.

6. Executive Summary for Assessment

SMT members did not have any updates or concerns about the draft language in the executive summary.

CDFW asked the SMT whether there is enough potential variability in OMR that they should consider assigning two bins of risk in the ITP assessment. CDFW observed that there is no hard rule about what conditions would precipitate a move from one to two risk bins. USBR staff noted that the operators seemed to be indicating that they expected relatively stable OMR for the next week.

Given that exports are likely to remain relatively stable, CDFW proposed describing risk with one bin with the assumption that OMR would remain around -3500 cfs. The SMT concurred with that categorization of the risk. CDFW will keep the rest of the Delta Smelt Assessment in the ITP the same as last week.

7. ITP Longfin Smelt Risk Assessment

CDFW proposed replicating last week's assessment of Longfin Smelt risk; the SMT agreed.

8. Additional Considerations/Discussion

- CDFW explained that one of the ITP conditions of approval is at least one additional Smelt Larva Survey (SLS) in the South and Central Delta in December to inform potential risks to the offspring of early spawning Longfin Smelt. The exact survey dates are to be determined by the SMT. CDFW is planning to do two surveys spaced two weeks apart. If there are no Longfin Smelt in the Chipps Island Survey next week, CDFW proposed waiting to deploy the first SLS survey the week of 12/14 and following up with the second survey the week of 12/28. They noted that a final decision about timing does not need to be made now; CDFW only needs a week lead time to implement the survey. The timing of these additional surveys will not impact the start date of the regular January surveys.
 - Other CDFW staff explained that Chipps Island catch is important because Longfin Smelt typically stage in the low salinity zone and then move quickly to spawn in fresh and brackish water. If they see catch at Chipps Island, a 12/14 survey will catch those early spawners and if there is no signal from catch at Chipps Island, the 12/28 date is a reasonable timeframe.
 - USFWS agreed that the proposed 12/14 and 12/28 start dates make sense.

- CDFW described the upcoming changes to the guidance document as they impact the structure of SMT meetings. The new agenda will have three parts: one, the regular data report-out; two, a structured open discussion, which will be guided by questions intended to identify species and life histories present and highlight key factors that should be considered (note: those questions will likely be refined throughout the season); and three, live-editing of the proposed action and ITP risk assessments. For the ITP Risk Assessment, CDFW will focus on a risk binning exercise in which the group will look at the potential for OMR to change, along with any environmental and operational changes that could translate into a change in risk. The proposed action Risk Assessment questions will continue to be addressed as usual.
 - USBR asked whether CDFW will provide draft ITP assessment language prior to the meeting. CDFW agreed that if there is an anticipated change, they will provide draft language in advance. Otherwise, the group should assume they will start with the prior week's assessment.
- USBR reminded the group to share any comments on the spreadsheet of SMT data sources by Friday (12/27).
- USFWS asked the group if there are plans to validate the DWR tool for estimating X2 when it is above the confluence. USFWS noted that the tool is very informative and can continue to be used while it is being validated.
 - Kearns & West observed that other SMT members had not provided feedback on whether they found the tool useful and whether it should be incorporated into the SMT's weekly review of environmental conditions and/or be validated, which will likely require an investment of staff resources. KW asked SMT members to email perspectives on the utility of the X2 tool to SMT decision-making and whether they were willing and able to provide the resources needed to validate it.
- Agencies reported no additional items for WOMT. No agency planned to elevate any items to WOMT.