

PARTICIPANTS

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

ACTION ITEMS

- SMT members to monitor conditions and request an additional meeting via email if warranted (e.g., winds over 20 mph create a turbidity event).
- CDFW to request the full Longfin Smelt catch data from UC Davis contact to determine whether the fish were male or female.

MEETING SUMMARY

PART 1: Updates on Water Operations and Biological Updates

Relevant Actions & Triggers

USBR shared the triggers that will lead to the First Flush conditions and subsequent onset of OMR management:

- Running three-day average of daily flows at Freeport >25,000 cfs; and
- Running three-day average of daily turbidity at Freeport ≥ 50 NTU¹; or
- Real-time monitoring indicates a high risk of migration and dispersal into areas at high risk of future entrainment.

CDFW noted that Conditions of Approval 8.3.1 (Integrated Early Winter Pulse Protection) and 8.3.3 (Adult Longfin Smelt Entrainment Protection) are in effect as of December 1st, but none of the triggers have been met. Under Condition 8.3.3, CDFW is currently using the November index to determine the salvage trigger; that will be replaced by the annual index once the final FMWT numbers are available. The November index provides a salvage trigger of two fish.

Condition of Approval 8.1.5.2 remains in effect and requires weekly risk assessments be conducted for Delta Smelt and Longfin Smelt.

Condition of Approval 8.4.2 will come into effect January 1st.

¹ The current instrumentation measures turbidity in FNU's.

Current Operations & Outlook

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

- USBR CVO stated that releases on the Sacramento River from Keswick Dam are currently at minimum flows of 3,250 cfs; they do not anticipate changes.
- CVO does not anticipate any changes in releases (1,250 cfs) on the American River from Nimbus Dam in December.
- CVO does not anticipate any changes to releases (200 cfs) on the Stanislaus River from New Melones.
- The Delta Cross-channel Gates will remain closed until mid-May 2021 per the Proposed Action description, and construction activities remain ongoing.
- Jones Pumping Plant exports remain at 800 cfs.
- Delta water quality continues to control export operations.
- Feather River releases from Oroville Dam are currently ramping down and will likely be decreased to 1,250 cfs by early next week.
- The details of the precipitation event forecasted to start Friday are still uncertain, but it could potentially drive the Sacramento River flows up to 6,000 cfs.
- With improved water quality conditions in the next week, the State has increased exports from Clifton Court from 1,500 cfs to 2,000 cfs and could potentially increase them to 4,000 cfs in the coming days.
- Delta outflows were 8,500 cfs yesterday due to accretions from the latest storms finally reaching the Delta; DWR expects those flows to drop in the coming days.
- QWEST is still positive (1289 cfs as of the 20th) but could get to -2,000 cfs due to low outflows; it will rise in coming days as those flows peter out, but then the next storm could drive it back into the low negatives.
- OMR is currently -2,500 cfs and DWR anticipates that it will be -3,000 tomorrow and then will likely settle around -3,500 cfs, which corresponds to a 3,000 cfs export level.
- X2 is still above the confluence but closer to Collinsville than it has been.
- Total San Luis storage is 919 TAF; the State share is 538 TAF and the federal share is 381 TAF.

Review of Environmental Conditions and Survey Updates

CDFW shared survey updates.

- SLS 12 (December 14 and 15) was completed. No Delta Smelt were caught. Only one fish was caught (a Rainwater Killifish).
- SLS 13 will begin December 28th and will sample only south and central Delta stations.

USFWS reported on EDSM.

- Zero Delta Smelt were detected last week (December 14th – 18th), so there was no abundance estimate generated.
- Five Longfin Smelt were detected last week (fork lengths of 72-106 mm) in the Suisun Marsh strata. USFWS believes they were all no expression but needs to confirm.
- EDSM cancelled trips on Monday and Tuesday this week due to heavy fog; they will sample Wednesday and Thursday this week.
- The Chipps Island survey crew did not survey last week due to COVID staffing issues; they will also not sample this week due to a combination of COVID and holiday staffing issues. They will start surveys again on December 27th.
- All four regions of the Delta were sampled in the last seven days.

CDFW provided a salvage update (December 14th to 20th).

- No salvage of Delta Smelt, Longfin Smelt, or any listed species have occurred this water year.
- There were no power outages or stoppage in pumping or salvage counts during this period.

USBR shared water quality data (three-station average daily water temperature as of December 21st was 9.78°C; three-day average flow at Freeport was 9,941 cfs; turbidity was 5.36 FNU) and the seven-day weather forecast for Antioch (mostly cloudy to sunny, W winds up to 34 mph tomorrow, ENE gusts the following day, E winds of 5 mph the rest of the week, and rain starting Friday and potentially continuing through the beginning of next week). QWEST was 1,289 cfs as of December 20th. X2 is >82 km, with estimated X2 for the Sacramento River at 89.5 km and the San Joaquin River at 91.7 km.

DWR reported that the UC Davis Fish Conservation and Culture Lab's Broodstock Collection has done 151 sets this season. They did a partial day of collection on Monday and will collect a couple days next week. They have caught no Delta Smelt or Longfin Smelt since the last update, which puts their collection total at seven Longfin Smelt for the year thus far.

PART 2: Open Discussion on Species Status (Structured-Unstructured Time)

SMT members offered perspectives on a series of questions provided for consideration.

- *What life stages are present?*
 - SMT members agreed that only adult Delta Smelt are currently present.
 - For Longfin Smelt, age 1 and age 2 fish are present. The presence of spawning fish in the south San Francisco Bay indicates Longfin Smelt are in spawning condition in the upper estuary even if spawning adults have yet to be detected in this region. CDFW said they are looking for evidence that spawning has occurred, but in its absence, they are continuing to assume only adults are present. They hope the SLS 13 will provide more information.
- *What distribution data is available? If no data is available, what abiotic factors can predict distribution? What abiotic factors are relevant? Are conditions in Central/South Delta conducive to DS or LFS presence? Have changes in abiotic factors increased or decreased risk of entrainment?*
 - USBR noted that conditions have not changed much since last week. There is rain in the forecast; USBR asked whether it is too early to determine what the impacts of that precipitation might be.
 - DWR said it is likely too early to know exactly what the impacts will be, but at this point, the forecast does not suggest that it will be a first flush event. The Sacramento area is anticipated to receive about an inch of rain.
 - CVO shared that the six-day forecast predicts 0.75 inches for the Sacramento Valley, more on the spine of the Sierra, 2 to 3 inches around the Smith and Shasta Basins, and decent precipitation in the Feather Basin. However, those totals are spread over six days, so the intensity of that rainfall will be muted.
 - CDFW stated that given the lack of detections of Longfin Smelt in the south and central Delta, they do not believe the risk of entrainment has changed and the risk assessment from last week is still valid. However, they do believe that Longfin Smelt are moving, so if exports increase, so does risk. CDFW acknowledged that -5,000 cfs OMR is still considered protective in the lower San Joaquin.

- DWR agreed with CDFW’s assessment and said that while additional pumping could increase risk by some marginal amount, -5,000 cfs should be protective of any fish that are not directly in the OMR corridor.
- DWR observed that the wind forecast for Antioch is not predicting sustained winds of more than 15 mph, so they do not anticipate any wind-driven turbidity in Franks Tract, but the SMT should keep an eye out for winds over 20 mph.
 - CDFW observed that any big increases in turbidity in the South Delta (i.e., Franks Tract and further south) could signal a change in risk to Delta Smelt and Longfin Smelt.
 - USBR noted that if there is rain over the weekend, that could result in rain-driven turbidity in the Delta by next week.
 - CDFW stated that it is harder to predict when rain-driven turbidity would arrive, but wind could generate turbidity immediately.

PART 3: Live-edit Assessments

Proposed Action Weekly Evaluation of Delta Smelt, including Distribution, Abiotic Conditions, Risk Assessment Questions, and Executive Summary

USBR pointed out that there is now language in the Outlook describing the state of Longfin Smelt; this is being drafted by DWR and will be updated weekly.

The group agreed to language in the turbidity section that characterized the forecasted rain event as not likely to cause a first flush condition.

The group reviewed the two relevant assessment questions: (1) Between December 1 and January 31, has any first flush condition been exceeded? And (2) Do Delta Smelt have a high risk of migration and dispersal into areas at high risk of future entrainment? There were no significant changes to the proposed language.

USBR suggested making an edit to clarify repetitive language in the prior week’s executive summary by removing a statement that *“the projected less negative OMR Index limits and low turbidity create a low risk of entrainment based on the lack of detections in the South Delta,”* and keeping the conclusion that *“Risk of Delta Smelt adult entrainment is slightly elevated due to the range of potential OMR values being more negative during the next seven days, but the overall probability of Delta Smelt moving into the south Delta is low.”* USFWS observed that the first sentence describes the overall risk picture, whereas the second describes risk in relation to last week’s risk assessment. Those are two different ways of examining risk that could be useful to different audiences. USBR agreed with the differentiation described by USFWS. The team decided to revise the language to keep both points but to be more explicit about the different lens being used in each statement.

Given that no Delta Smelt have been detected recently anywhere in the Delta, the team removed the statement that the lack of detections in the South Delta are evidence of low risk to Delta Smelt.

USBR voiced their preference for using the word “likelihood” rather than “risk” when referring to the likelihood of entrainment.

No non-consensus issues were identified.

ITP Longfin Smelt Risk Assessment

CDFW stated that they plan to replicate the Delta Smelt executive summary from the Proposed Action Assessment. There were no concerns voiced.

For Longfin Smelt, CDFW stated that there has been no change to the life stages present in the Delta and no advice is warranted. The risk could be elevated because the season is advancing, but CDFW does not feel that is sufficient to change the assessment. Therefore, CDFW proposed keeping risk assessment low for the -2,500 cfs OMR bin, and moderate for fish in the OMR corridor if OMR were to increase to -5,500 cfs OMR. The team supported CDFW's proposed approach.

DWR observed that the freshening of the Delta discussed on last week's call occurred, which allowed exports to be increased without threatening water quality. The group agreed this did not need to be stated explicitly in the Risk Assessment.

DWR provided an update to the status of the tidal cycle, which is transitioning from a neap to a spring cycle and could result in increased salinity prior to the storm; overall, it could have a minor impact.

There were no items to elevate to WOMT with regards to Longfin Smelt.

Additional Considerations/Discussion

There were no additional considerations.