BUREAU OF RECLAMATION

Stanislaus Watershed Team

10 a.m.–12 p.m., Stanislaus Watershed Team Notes
https://www.usbr.gov/mp/bdo/stanislaus-watershed-team.html

Wednesday, February 16, 2022

1. Action Items

    a. JD - Create flow shape proposal for the remainder of February and March and distribute for feedback.

    b. Erin/JD – Discuss how to calculate the Vernalis compliance value.

    c. Peggy – Add a storage release forecast to handout materials.

    d. Barb – Look up past feedback from Jarom regarding TriDam's constraints/preferences.

2. Introductions

    a. USBR: Liz Kiteck, Suzanne Manugian, Peggy Manza, Lee Mao

    b. NMFS: Katrina Poremba, Barb Byrne

    c. USFWS: JD Wikert

    d. CDFW: Gretchen Murphey, Crystal Rigby, Steve Tsao

    e. SWRCB: Yongxuan Gao, Erin Foresman, Chris Carr

    f. SSJID: Brandon Nakagawa, Peter Rietkerk

    g. OID: Steve Knell

    h. Stockton East:

    i. Central San Joaquin Water Conservation District:

j. DWR: Matt Meyers, Jamieson Scott

k. WAPA:

l. FISHBIO:

m. Other:

n. Kearns & West: Rafael Silberblatt, Mia Schiappi, Karis Johnston

3. Announcements

a. SWRCB reported that the State Water Board, at its Board meeting yesterday, adopted an Order on Reconsideration denying in part and granting in part petitions for reconsideration of two Executive Director's decisions in 2021: approvals of 1) a Temporary Urgency Change Petition (to D-1641 requirements) and 2) a Temperature Management Plan (pursuant to Order 90-5). The adopted Order should be posted soon on the State Water Board website at https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/waterrights/water_issues/programs/drought/tucp/.

4. Operations Update and Forecasts/Hydrology

a. USBR provided an operations update that storage is low and they do not anticipate any significant gain.

b. Daily Operation Report:

i. Stanislaus River releases were 1500 cfs for the first ten days of the month before being reduced to 900 cfs to maintain Vernalis flow objectives. A Change Order scheduled for 2/16 will further lower releases to 800 cfs.

c. New Melones:

i. There were only two days where there was a gain in storage as a result of lowering releases from 1,500 cfs to 900 cfs. Storage has levelled off after the release change and will likely stay level.

d. Tulloch:

i. USBR explained how Tulloch releases are operated in relation to the New Melones and Goodwin Reservoir.

e. Goodwin Reservoir:

i. Irrigation season has begun, which is demonstrated by the releases to the joint main canal.

ii. Goodwin releases were higher at the the beginning of the month to meet the 2,280 cfs requirement at Vernalis. When the forecast changed to a goal of 1,140, Goodwin releases decreased.

Questions/Comments:

- USBR clarified that because there was an inspection at Tulloch's power plant the releases were more than could go through the generators and the remainder of the water was spilled at Tulloch.
    - USFWS requested that if USBR knows that there are scheduled inspections that may be impacted by flow shaping, communication will allow USFWS to schedule flow in a way to maximize the benefit and minimize the losses of power production.
- CDFW asked how much of the 984,000 acre feet of current New Melones storage belongs to USBR (as opposed to the water districts) and whether USBR has enough water to meet all of their requirements.
    - USBR responded that based on the allocation equation, the water districts will receive all of the inflow under 600,000 acre feet plus 1/3 of the difference between 600,000 and the actual flow. The districts also have a conservation account that has a maximum storage of 200,000 acre-feet that they can use in dry years to supplement their allocation.

5. Temperature Updates
    a. NMFS provided an overview of Temperature Updates (see Figure 9). Water temperature increased due to higher air temperatures but is not anomalous for this time of year and is still within the incubation thresholds for steelhead spawning and incubation.

6. Flow Planning
    a. USFWS will put together a straw proposal for the remainder of February through the first two weeks of April. The intent is not to go over 1500 cfs to allow the weir to operate, plan for 450 cfs weekly at Goodwin Canyon for the CDFW steelhead survey, and two days at 300 cfs to remove the steelhead egg cages. USFWS will also consider that Tri Dam prefers to make changes during normal working hours.

Questions/Comments

- NMFS suggested USBR and SWRCB provide a high and low number for forecasted Stanislaus flows necessary to meet the Vernalis requirements.
    - USBR responded that because it is unknown how many Chipps days will be required in March, USFWS should assume 1140 cfs as the high flow at Vernalis and that there is a 7-day running average of 912 cfs unless the SRWCB provides, in writing, the flexibility to go below 912

cfs. SWRCB estimated the low for March at 824 cfs, although that may be an outdated number, and reiterated that USBR and SWRCB need to discuss their math to determine that the methods are consistent.

- NMFS asked USBR whether the doubled ramping rates are necessary to get to the 300 cfs necessary for the removal of the steelhead egg cages.
    - USBR responded that it shouldn't be difficult with the standard ramping rates. USFWS would prefer to stay with standard ramping rates and USBR agreed.

7. Stanislaus River Forum (SRF) Call Review

    a. The Stanislaus River Forum call was held via MS Teams on Tuesday February 15, 2022. Reclamation provided updates on current hydrology and operations. The same handouts were used for both SRF and SWT. The fishery agencies provided updates on in stream temperatures and current fishery activities.. A question was raised about what the New Melones releases would need to be for the month of March. Reclamation responded that we won't be able to make that projection until we know what the exact March Vernalis Flow objective will be.

8. Fish Monitoring and Studies

    a. NMFS noted that the weir is running longer this year because of USBR's efforts to do steelhead monitoring for the 2019 Proposed Action. Because flows were kept at or below 1,500 cfs, there has not been a gap in weir operations which should ensure a continuous sampling record. NMFS will start providing a chart for *O. mykiss* because while adult fall-run Chinook passage is over (fry have begun to emerge), there is potential for seeing adult *O. mykiss* at the weir.

    b. Sampling at the rotary screw traps at Oakdale and Caswell began in January.

    c. The Oakdale figure shows that there are fry emerging and movement is occurring in association with increased flows and flow variability.

    d. The Caswell State Park Rotary Screw Trap has seen button-up fry and yolk sac fry as expected for this time of year.

    e. Mossdale Trawl Sampling

        i. CDFW has been working with USFWS since January and have caught two fall-run-sized yolk sac Chinook salmon.

        ii. *O. mykiss* redd surveys are being conducted, but visibility has been poor due to higher flows and canyon surveys were not conducted this month due to unsafe flows.

<u>Questions/Comments:</u>

- OID commented that in the Stanislaus River over 6,000 fish have come up the river but only approximately 500 fish have come up the Tuolumne River and it appears that the hyacinth is affecting the ability of returning adult Chinook salmon to get up the Tuolumne.

    - CDFW responded that based on prior research in past drought years it is more likely due to a lack of fall pulse flow on the Tuolumne. Past research showed that other rivers that also had high levels of hyacinth still had salmon arriving.

    - USFWS also commented that not all fall run Chinook are marked at 25%. Rather, some are marked at 100% or a random percentage that varies from year to year, therefore if there are over 25% ad clip fish returning it does not necessarily mean that none are naturally produced.

- USFWS noted that they were on the Stanislaus River this week after the winter instability flow implemented with doubled ramping rates and did not see many stranded fish. There were a handful near Goodwin Dam, including some dead fish.

    - CDFW commented that stranded fish were observed in some places where water is stranded, including at Honolulu Bar. USFWS also explained that fish getting stranded is a normal process in a complex floodplain, and that as long as there are not a large number of fish stranded because of artificial circumstances there is value to the food chain to have the fish available for other animals to eat.

9. Restoration Project Updates

    a. Spawning and rearing habitat restoration

        i. No updates

    b. Temperature management study

        i. NMFS noted that the temperature management study created a habitat subgroup that reviewed the life history and timing of the salmonids present in the Stanislaus River and the locations in which temperature is important in order to inform the model. Anyone interested in looking at the draft life-history timing spreadsheet should reach out to Barb.

        ii. CDFW added that the temperature model will likely only go to the confluence of the Stanislaus River and not include the San Joaquin River.

    c. Yellow-Bellied cuckoo survey

        i. USFWS and USBR are discussing Yellow-Bellied cuckoo as part of the Reinitiation of Consultation for the Long-Term Operations of the Central Valley Project and State Water Project process.

10. Progress Update on Proposed Action Elements

Questions/Comments:

11. Other Discussion Items

    a. Curtailments

        i. There were no updates on curtailments. Based on the last SWRCB meeting, staff are going to update the water availability methodology before doing more curtailments.

    b. Annual reporting check-in

        i. USBR is finalizing the report and working on 508 compliance.

    c. Review/revise Ops Outlook table section

        i. NA

    d. Items to elevate to WOMT

        i. NA

12. Next Meeting

    a. Wednesday, March 16, 2022 (10am-12pm)