



Stanislaus Watershed Team

December 21, 2022

Members Attending

- USBR: Liz Kiteck, Zarela Guerrero, Peggy Manza, Claire Hsu, Spencer Marshall, Melissa Vignau, Elissa Buttermore, Brad Hubbard
- USFWS: JD Wikert
- CDFW: Gretchen Murphey, Crystal Rigby, Steve Tsao
- NMFS: Barb Byrne, Evan Sawyer
- DWR: Mike Ford
- SWRCB: Chris Carr, Yongxuan Gao, Erin Foresman
- Stockton East: Justin Hopkins
- Other: Logan Day, Brandon Nakagawa
- Kearns & West: Karis Johnston, Mia Schiappi

Announcements

NA

Operations Update and Forecasts/ Hydrology

New Melones

- There was 8.75 inches of accumulated precipitation at New Melones last month; however, there has not been an increase in flow to New Melones as most of the precipitation has been in the form of snowpack.
- Storage at New Melones is slowly increasing and is currently at 615 TAF.
- Accumulated inflow for WY 2023 is 70 TAF. This is below the 15-year average.

Tulloch

- Releases from Tulloch are approximately 200 cfs to maintain releases out of Goodwin to meet the winter base flow of 200 cfs.
- On 12/18/22 a small amount of water was sent down the spillway because the power plant was offline doing maintenance.

Goodwin

- On 12/4/22, 12/10/22-12/12/22 flows from Goodwin Dam exceeded the 200 cfs base flow because there was local side flow between Tulloch and Goodwin.

Forecast

- At the 50% exceedance, End of September storage in New Melones Reservoir is anticipated to be 650 TAF.
- At the 90% exceedance, End of September storage in New Melones Reservoir is anticipated to be 400 TAF.
- If it is an average year, outflow should equal inflow and storage will remain steady.
- In order for storage to make a significant recovery, there would need to be significant precipitation this season.

Comments/Questions:

- NMFS asked for an update on the Water Supply Index and projections for January and February 2023.
 - USBR responded that while they don't have projections for January and February, they are planning for a critical water year. With the increase in precipitation there is a chance that the 75% exceedance could move the San Joaquin River into the “dry” category. This would impact planning for Vernalis base flow objectives. The SRPs and in-basin needs would still be based on the 90% exceedance; however, it is unlikely that there will be enough precipitation to move it into the “dry” category.

Water Temperature Updates

- Temperatures at Orange Blossom Bridge and Ripon are currently below 55 °F. The water temperatures warmed temporarily during the storm due to warmer air temperatures associated with conditions such as cloud cover.

Flow Planning

- The draft January Winter Instability Flow (WIF) schedule that NMFS recently shared is similar to the WIF schedules used in past years with the following exception: in WY 2022, increased ramping rates were used as part of a pilot study; however, those increased ramping rates will not be used this WY.
- The SWT reviewed the flow shapes and flow schedules in the WIF. Based on SWT feedback, the January WIF is anticipated to be implemented during the second half of January to maximize the benefit to newly emerging Chinook fry
- The goal is to align the February pulse flows with a storm event to take advantage of migratory cues such as cloud cover, barometric pressure, and turbidity. The targeted time for the February pulse flows is during the second half of the month.

Comments/Questions:

- CDFW asked whether the reshaped WIF alternatives are usually used or is the standard default flow schedule in the Stepped Release Plan (SRP) used?
 - NMFS responded that the reshaped alternatives are used in order to get the water higher. The three main benefits to planning releases with precipitation events are: flow variability, which is a good cue for steelhead, can mobilize any existing fry in the river, and higher flows allow water to reach the floodplain which flushes terrestrial material into the river for a food chain boost.
 - USFWS noted that one of the big drivers of salmonid survival is flow variability. The flow plans attempt to mimic what would happen naturally through a storm event with the small amount of water available.
 - CDFW commented that the flows look reasonable.
 - NMFS asked CDFW if they have any concerns about the peaks based on their steelhead redd survey schedules.
 - CDFW responded that because the pulse flow is on a short schedule, they can work around it. If it ended up being a longer pulse, then further discussion might be necessary.
 - USBR commented that because the flows are not large, they are prepared to be ready for change orders on a 24-hour schedule.
 - NMFS suggested running a January pulse in the second half of the month in conjunction with a precipitation event and then running a second pulse anytime in February if there is a storm event with which to pair it.
 - CDFW agreed with this plan.
 - USFWS suggested that late February would be a better time for the pulse because in early January there are a lot of fish that are still sac fry and in gravel. If temperatures are colder than usual (and as a result egg development is slower and fry emergence is delayed), then a pulse in late February would do a better job of moving more fish downstream.
 - NMFS suggested reaching out to the SWT via email during the first couple weeks of February to discuss the best options based on the forecast.

Stanislaus River Forum (SRF) Call Review

- No updates.

Fish Monitoring

- Adult salmon carcass surveys on the Stanislaus River are beginning to slow down and will be completed in January. There was a spike in live fish observed during the storm in early December, so carcass survey numbers may increase.
- Tuolumne and Merced Rivers carcass surveys ended early and abruptly based on staffing issues.

- Steelhead redd surveys will begin in early January 2023 through April 2023.
- The Oakdale RST will not begin trapping for juvenile salmonids until February. These RSTs had funding issues this year so trapping may not be conducted as frequently week to week and the traps will have a shorter season overall.
- The Mossdale trawl is currently running.
- The Caswell RST is planned for installation in early January by PSMFC.

Restoration Project Updates

- USFWS collaborated with Caswell State Park on submitting an application to the CVPIA NOFO (Notice of Funding Opportunity) to create additional fish habitat within Caswell State Park.
- USFWS is working with the City of Oakdale on the Stanley Wakefield restoration project and construction will likely begin in summer 2023.

Progress Update on Proposed Action Elements

- No update.

Other Discussion Items

Curtailments

- Curtailments in the Delta watershed are currently suspended but that is subject to change.

Annual Reporting

- USBR distributed the final SWT Annual Report, and it will be posted on their website soon.

Items to elevate to WOMT

- No items for WOMT.

Next Meeting

Wednesday, January 18, 10:00 am –12:00 pm.