

Determination of Actions Required Under Component 1 of the 2008 OCAP Biological Opinion
December 31, 2012

For the week of December 31, 2012, the Service has determined that OMR flows be no more negative than -2000 cfs, with the potential to move to an increased negative OMR of -3500 cfs as early as January 3, 2013, contingent upon completion of an acceptable adaptive management plan.

The Service's determination is based in part on the SWG recommendation made on December 31, 2012. The SWG recommended maintaining OMR flows of no more negative than -2000 cfs during the transition between Action 1, which ends on January 1, 2013, and the initiation of Action 2. The SWG also proposed that if, during the 7 days after Action 1, there are 4 succeeding days of zero salvage, or if there is zero salvage in 5 out of the 7 days, the SWG would meet to discuss the potential to lift the extension of -2000 cfs OMR. The SWG considered its recommendation to maintain -2000 cfs OMR to be necessary, based on information available on this date, to protect pre-spawning adult delta smelt from entrainment and, to the extent possible, from adverse hydrodynamic conditions.

The Service believes turbidity propagation within the Delta is an important aspect of delta smelt risk assessment. That risk assessment continues to be hampered by the lack of clarity in turbidity modeling, and in what turbidity modeling tells us about the effect of OMR choices on turbidity in the Central and South Delta. Available tools are still in development, multiple strategies are being used, and the predictions vary considerably. The Service believes that further development of turbidity management tools, in particular tools that allow inference of the management implications of different OMR flow levels, is important to delta smelt protection in the future.

The Service is therefore inviting its partners to help define an adaptive management study to help clarify the appropriate use of available tools to predict the effect of OMR choices on turbidity propagation. The strategy must have scientific merit (specific hypotheses, clear monitoring and evaluation strategy, appropriately scaled management action(s), and predictions of outcomes), to help assure that the adaptive management investigation can be successfully conducted while still providing necessary protection to pre-spawning adult delta smelt. On the basis of available information, and because considerable work has already been done, the Service believes a properly framed adaptive management investigation that protects delta smelt could begin with a management action at -3500 cfs OMR as early as January 3, contingent on completion of an adaptive management plan having the qualities described above that clearly lays out management alternatives to be tested.