

January 11, 2017

FWS Response to SWG Recommendation

The Smelt Working Group met on Monday, January 9 and found that the risk of entrainment to the facilities was high regardless of the level of OMR flow based on an assessment of delta conditions and survey information. Further, the working group recommends setting the most positive OMR available under the BiOp if there is a salvage event or if additional survey data detects delta smelt in the south Delta where they will be at risk for salvage to the facilities.

The Service maintains the January 6 determination under Action 2 to maintain Old and Middle River (OMR) flow at no more negative than -5000 cfs on a 14-day running average, with a simultaneous 5-day running average no more negative than -6250 cfs (within 25 percent). Action 2 is designed to protect adults that have migrated upstream and are residing in the Delta prior to spawning. Under the BiOp, Action 2 may be temporarily suspended while the three day flow average remains greater than or equal to 90,000 cfs on the Sacramento River at Rio Vista and 10,000 cfs on the San Joaquin River at Vernalis. Once flows have abated below these levels the action is resumed.

Flows on the Sacramento River at Rio Vista are expected to exceed 100,000 cfs and the San Joaquin at Vernalis is expected to well exceed 10,000 cfs later this week which we anticipate will initiate a temporary suspension of Action 2. Effects from the most recent storms are projected to keep turbidity conditions elevated throughout the Delta. Given the extremely high flows forecasted on the San Joaquin, Reclamation and DWR plan to increase exports, potentially to plant capacity at both facilities, while maintaining the net -5000 cfs OMR flow. OMR is expected to be much less negative as SJR flows peak, even with the BiOp suspended. On January 10, one delta smelt was observed in salvage at the Tracy facilities, bringing the estimated cumulative take for WY17 to 4 delta smelt. At this time, the Service does not believe this salvage event will cause the projects to approach their take limit of 64 for this year, but we will continue to closely monitor salvage reports. The Enhanced Delta Smelt Monitoring survey is scheduled to survey the south Delta this week per the Smelt Working Group's request and may provide additional insight on the distribution of delta smelt located within the high risk zones.

We will continue to seek recommendations from the Smelt Working Group and monitor conditions, including turbidity, results of the Enhanced Delta Smelt Monitoring, Sacramento River flow levels and other Delta inflows, and salvage.