

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Statement on the California WaterFix

The California Department of Water Resources and the Bureau of Reclamation have proposed to build the California WaterFix, which is an infrastructure project that would construct two tunnels to convey water from the north to the south Delta. The purpose of WaterFix is to modernize water infrastructure and provide a secure and reliable source of water to meet the needs of farmers and communities, while including measures to address the needs of fish and wildlife. These three goals – Providing water for California's rich farmland, growing human population, and distinct fisheries, migratory birds, and conservation lands – are all important to the people of California.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is charged with reviewing the effects of proposed projects like WaterFix on threatened and endangered species and other trust resources such as migratory birds. Our role is to complete a rigorous and independent review using the best available science, and to produce a biological opinion as required under the Endangered Species Act. When impacts to imperiled species may occur, we work with project proponents to adopt measures that avoid or minimize those impacts. Our assessment of WaterFix, which is now finalized, was reviewed in detail by a panel of independent scientists and represents the culmination of a tremendous effort by our own scientists.

We have concluded that WaterFix will not jeopardize threatened or endangered species, or adversely modify their critical habitat. We have documented some impacts from construction, and have worked with the Department of Water Resources and the Bureau of Reclamation to develop a plan to restore habitat to minimize and mitigate those impacts. We also believe WaterFix will, by routing water supply through the tunnels, reduce entrainment of fish from the State and Federal water pumping facilities in the south Delta, which has been a concern in the past. In addition, we recognize that a number of future decisions will address important details related to WaterFix construction and final operations, especially the new water management operational plan for the Central Valley Project and State Water Project and habitat restoration in the Bay Delta. We are committed to being a full partner on those efforts in the coming years to ensure the needs of fish and wildlife are addressed.

Investments in infrastructure and habitat restoration can help address the needs of farmers, communities, and fish and wildlife. In addition, the amount of rainfall and snowpack in any given year plays a pivotal role. In drought years, such as those we've seen recently, it is difficult to meet all needs. This year's precipitation offered a welcomed reprieve to drought, but posed new challenges to existing infrastructure. It is important that all partners continue to improve the health of the Bay Delta so it can help meet all needs to the maximum extent possible in both dry and wet years in the future.

To that end, we applaud the leadership of the State of California and our other partners in efforts such as EcoRestore, which is restoring key habitat, and the Delta Smelt and Salmon Resiliency Strategies, which are taking actions to improve the condition of these imperiled species. We have and will continue to be a full partner in these important activities. In addition, we are committed to continue managing our National Wildlife Refuges to meet the needs of migratory birds and other species, working closely with farmers and many other partners to conserve fish and wildlife for the benefit of the American people.

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