

Information Item

Implementation of the Delta Smelt Resiliency Strategy

Summary: The Delta Smelt Resiliency Strategy (Strategy) is a set of immediate and near-term management actions intended to improve the status of delta smelt by promoting drought resiliency and improving habitat conditions. Staff from the California Natural Resources Agency (Resources), the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW), and the Department of Water Resources (DWR) will present the Strategy and be available to answer questions and discuss the Strategy with Council members.

Background

Long-term fish monitoring surveys in the Delta have recorded record low numbers of delta smelt for two-consecutive years. This, in addition to critically low abundance estimates since their listing under the federal and State endangered species acts in 1993 and 2010, respectively, prompted Resources to issue the Strategy in July 2016. The Strategy has been developed to reverse the negative population size trend through voluntary management actions.

The 13 actions proposed in the Strategy address the immediate and near-term needs of delta smelt. The actions are varied and include habitat restoration, water quality improvements, food production increases, and flow alterations to expand the area of low salinity in the Delta. The actions are intended to be implemented by State agencies—DWR, DFW, and the Department of Boating and Waterways—with assistance from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation in actions that involve flows.

The 2016-17 State budget allocates funds for early implementation of three of the proposed actions—\$1.8 million for Aquatic Weed Control, \$1.6 million for North Delta Aquatic Food Web Adaptive Management Projects, and \$400,000 for a Frank's Tract Restoration Feasibility Study.

The proposed actions vary in their scope and readiness. DWR is currently detailing plans for implementation of all 13 actions; details of how these actions will be carried out are still being developed.

Nexus with the Delta Plan

The Strategy is relevant to the Council because the proposed actions represent active adaptive management experiments to begin testing a number of newly refined assumptions about the survival of delta smelt and reproduction throughout the species' life-cycle. The proposed actions are also an opportunity to inform effective application of the adaptive management approach based on Governance Policy 1 (G P1) of the Delta Plan. They also have implications for several current Delta Plan policies regarding flow (ER P1), restoring habitat (ER P 2 & ER P3) and use of floodplains (ER P4), as well as

potential amendments related to conveyance, storage, and operations, and habitat restoration.

The Delta Reform Act generally requires compliance with the Delta Plan by projects wholly or partly in the Delta that are carried out by State or local agencies that may impact the achievement of the coequal goals of water supply reliability and protecting, enhancing and restoring the Delta ecosystem (Public Resources Code section 21065). Given the broad approach taken in the Strategy, it is likely one or more of the individual actions could be a covered action requiring certification of consistency with the Delta Plan.

Actions in the Strategy that may affect water supply reliability include outflow augmentation, storm water discharge management, and Frank's Tract Restoration. Proposed actions that may affect the ecosystem include near-term delta smelt habitat restoration, sediment supplementation, adjusting fish salvage operations, spawning habitat augmentation and aquatic weed control.

Panel Members

- Kris Tjernell, Special Assistant for Water Policy, Resources Agency
- Carl Wilcox, Policy Advisor to the Director for the Delta, DFW
- Cindy Messer, Assistant Chief Deputy Director, DWR

Next Steps

Panel members will provide an overview of the Strategy. Topics the Council may consider for discussion include:

- Who is involved and how are the plans for each action being developed? Is the best available science being applied? Are adaptive management principles outlined for the development and implementation of the plan?
- What will the role of the Council and its Science Program be in implementing the Strategy?
- Would the Council consider updates on this project helpful?

Fiscal Information

Not applicable.

List of Attachments

None.

Contact

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