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CALIFORNIA'S PRIMARY WATER SUPPLY SLASHED

Long-term Restrictions Are Devastating to Public Water Agencies

Sacramento, CA – Public water agencies throughout Northern, Central and Southern California now face major supply cutbacks in the latest federal regulatory blow to their ability to deliver water to customers. The restrictions point sharply to the need for a more comprehensive and sensible approach to managing the state's water supply and fish habitat concerns.

The cutbacks, effective immediately, were outlined today by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in a revised biological opinion for the Delta smelt, a threatened fish species that lives in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta (Delta). The biological opinion, or permit, sets guidelines for State Water Project (SWP) and Central Valley Project (CVP) pumping operations out of the Delta to ensure there is no long-term jeopardy to the health and habitat of the Delta smelt. The SWP and CVP are the state's primary water delivery systems and collectively deliver water to 25 million Californians and 3 million acres of agricultural land.

"California's primary water supply has just taken another big hit," said Laura King Moon, assistant general manager of the State Water Contractors. "This is a major new reduction in water deliveries that will impact families, businesses and farmers throughout California."

The timing of the new delivery cutbacks couldn't be worse. California is in a severe drought. Our state reservoirs are at their lowest levels in years. A much reduced water supply will have severe economic impacts during the worst economic crisis of our lifetime. To put this in perspective, a recent study, commissioned by public water agencies, determined that the economic impact of a 30 percent water supply cutback could range from \$500 million annually to more than \$3 billion during prolonged dry periods.

At the same time, there has been no conclusive scientific evidence that water delivery cutbacks from the Delta will benefit the Delta smelt. Scientists have identified several other possible causes of the smelt population decline. Invasive plants and aquatic animals are upsetting chemical and biological balances in the Delta, toxic runoff from pesticides and wastewater treatment plant discharges are flowing through Delta waters and nonnative predator fish introduced for sport fishing have altered the natural food web.

“Public water agencies are committed to the rehabilitation of fish populations in the Delta. We firmly believe that the only way to be successful is to focus on all of the factors impacting the species – not just finger-pointing at water exports,” added Moon.

“We’ve hit ground zero officially. This species-by-species approach to addressing the Delta crisis is destroying our statewide water supply,” added Moon. “Piecemeal regulations and lawsuits won’t restore the ecosystem or ensure water supplies for our people, businesses and farms – We need a comprehensive plan for the Delta.”

Public water agencies, environmental organizations, and state and federal agencies are working together to develop a long-term solution. The Bay Delta Conservation Plan (BDCP), a comprehensive conservation plan for the Delta, will provide a basis for addressing the many threats to the Delta needed for fishery and ecosystem recovery, while finding a way to continue to deliver water to Californians throughout the state.

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The State Water Contractors is a non-profit association of 27 public agencies from Northern, Central and Southern California that purchase water under contract from the California State Water Project. Collectively the State Water Contractors deliver water to more than 25 million residents throughout the state and more than 750,000 acres of agricultural lands. For more information on the State Water Contractors, please visit www.swc.org.