



BACKGROUND ON RECENT DELTA WATER SUPPLY LOSSES

Two sets of regulatory restrictions, or “biological opinions,” are guiding the operations of the State Water Project and Central Valley Project. At the moment, only one set of the restrictions, relating to winter- and spring-run salmon, is impacting the project operations. These restrictions reduce the ability to transport water supplies across the Delta by limiting intensity of the “reverse flows” at a key spot in the pathway in the estuary, at Old and Middle rivers. For the first 19 days of the month, these restrictions did not result in a loss of water supply because the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers did not contain surplus flows above and beyond flows needed to meet existing water quality requirements. The recent storms, however, then began to create significant additional flows into the Delta on January 20, illustrating the impact of the restrictions in wet conditions.

On Monday, January 25, as an example, the State Water Project (at the Banks pumping facility) pumped at an average rate of 2,734 cubic feet per second (cfs). The Central Valley Project (at the Jones pumping facility) pumped at a rate of 2,696 cfs. If the new restrictions were not in place, the State Water Project would have been pumping at 8,038 cfs, the Central Valley Project facility at 4,250 cfs. The pumping impact on this single day amounted to a loss of 13,505 acre-feet of water. That is enough water to sustain roughly 27,000 families for a year.

A second potential set of restrictions, relating to the endangered delta smelt, have yet to result in impacts to water supplies this month. However, if as few as two smelt are salvaged at the project facilities or if turbidity (a measure of water quality) at three key Delta locations exceeds specified levels, additional restrictions could be immediately triggered that could reduce pumping from the already-low levels by another 6,000 acre-feet for a minimum of 14 days.

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