

Delta water report unpopular upstream

Sean Janssen, Sonora Union Democrat, 10-27-10

Local agencies dislike what they see in a report from the California Environmental Protection Agency on what is needed to improve conditions for salmon and other species in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

The report, “Development of Flow Criteria for the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Ecosystem,” suggests that more water be allowed to flow from the Stanislaus, Tuolumne, Mokelumne and other rivers into the Delta, to improve conditions for salmon, smelt, shad and other fish.

But upstream users like the Tuolumne Utilities District and Calaveras County Water District think measures called for in the non-binding report that now sits before the newly formed advisory Delta Stewardship Council threaten their water supplies.

If the measures proposed in the report are eventually adopted, reductions on local water use could be forced and “Calaveras County residents and CCWD ratepayers could potentially end up having to pay,” said Ed Pattison, CCWD’s water resources manager.

Too much of the burden of improving the Delta would rest on upstream users’ shoulders, he said.

“The beneficiaries should pay, which are largely the exporters from the Delta,” Pattison said.

The impacts of habitat restoration and predation need to be considered, not just flows, he added.

The CCWD board supports a recovery plan for the Delta that is comprehensive, Pattison said.

“It needs to be based on good science, not just on politics, which seems to be the way of water in California,” he said.

TUD General Manager Pete Kampa echoed Pattison’s sentiments.

“It’s not a report that we look favorably on and we don’t agree with the findings and recommendations,” Kampa said.

“We hope that no one uses it for any legislative or regulatory purpose because it’s not based on what we consider to be sound science.”

Environmental advocates, such as the California Water Impact Network, California Sportfishing Protection Alliance and AquAlliance, have praised calls for added flow into the Delta. They argue that increased flows can reduce contaminant concentrations and improve overall water quality.

The Modesto Irrigation District is undergoing federal re-licensing for Don Pedro dam and reservoir, operated in conjunction with the Turlock Irrigation District.

MID spokeswoman Melissa Williams emphasized the non-binding nature of the report, saying it is for information purposes only for the Bay Delta Conservation Plan. She added, however, that the report “could be a topic of discussion” at upcoming workshops with the San Joaquin River Group Authority and the State Water Resources Control Board