



Media Release

State Water Board Releases Draft Order Amending the Bureau of Reclamation's Water Rights for the Cachuma Project on the Santa Ynez River in Santa Barbara County

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SACRAMENTO – The State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board or Board) today released a draft order that would require increased flows from Cachuma Reservoir on the Santa Ynez River to better protect endangered steelhead trout while also minimizing the impacts on water users and safeguarding downstream senior water rights.

Following a hearing held in parts over 12 years, the State Water Board's draft order finds that the river's steelhead population is unlikely to reach good condition without additional flows and habitat for spawning and rearing fish. The steelhead run, once the largest in Southern California with up to 30,000 adult fish annually, has declined 99 percent since the reservoir's construction in 1953, to fewer than 100 fish today.

Built by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), the Cachuma Project, consisting of Bradbury Dam and Cachuma Reservoir, supplies water to agencies in Santa Barbara County, including the city of Santa Barbara, Goleta Water District, Montecito Water District, Summerland County Water District, Carpinteria Valley Water District and Santa Ynez Water Conservation District, Improvement District No.1. The State Water Board's draft order would modify Reclamation's water right permits for storing water in the reservoir.

The draft order would require the release of additional flows beyond those required by the National Marine Fisheries Service's Biological Opinion in 2000 mandating minimum flow rates and other measures to prevent the steelhead's extinction below Bradbury Dam. This will provide additional steelhead habitat downstream of the dam. Although Reclamation has made efforts to operate and maintain the dam in accordance with this opinion, the population has not recovered. The California Fish and Game Code requires that dam owners release enough water to keep fish below the dam in good condition.

The draft order includes flexible measures to manage the additional flows and requires monitoring and studies to help the Board determine any other actions necessary to protect steelhead and other species. The order would also require Reclamation to study the feasibility



of fish passage above the dam, which would provide additional habitat for the endangered species. Blocking access to upstream spawning and rearing grounds was one of the main factors contributing to the steelhead's decline, according to the hearing record.

To minimize impacts on water users, higher flows would be required only during wetter years and not during the current drought emergency. Providing higher future flows may reduce storage in Cachuma Reservoir going into drier years and may result in decreased water supply over time for areas served by the reservoir in future droughts. The draft order requires that water supply managers for areas served by Cachuma Reservoir implement conservation measures to prepare for future dry periods.

The draft order also incorporates conditions of an existing settlement agreement that protects more senior downstream water right holders from injury due to either changes in water quality or a reduction in the quantity of water available to those water rights. In addition, the draft order would approve requested changes to the place and purposes of use of Cachuma Project water because those changes were not found to affect Cachuma Project operations or flows in the Santa Ynez River.

Historically, the Santa Ynez River was a major spawning ground and nursery stream that supported the largest steelhead run in Southern California. Anadromous steelhead are born in freshwater streams where they live for one to two years before swimming to the ocean to mature, and then return to their fresh water origins to reproduce.

Construction of Bradbury Dam blocked access to upstream spawning and rearing grounds, contributing to the decline of the steelhead population, which was listed as endangered species in 1997. The dam also changed the timing of flows in the Santa Ynez River and resulted in a reduction in water available to fish as well as downstream water right holders.

The State Water Board is the state agency responsible for issuing water right permits and licenses and enforcing many of California's water right laws. The State Water Board also has broad authority to establish minimum flows and take other measures needed to protect fisheries and other public trust resources.

The deadline to submit written public comments on this draft order is noon, October 25, 2016. The State Water Board will consider adoption of the draft order at a future Board meeting.

More information on the Cachuma Project Hearing is available on the following Cachuma Project Hearing webpage at:

http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/waterrights/water_issues/programs/hearings/cachuma/

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