



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
San Francisco Bay-Delta Fish and Wildlife Office
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Mr. James D. Marshall, P.E.
Senior Water Resources Control Engineer
Regional Water Quality Control Board, Central Valley Region
1120 Sun Center Drive, #200
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JUN 30 2014

Subject: Comments on the Tentative Order Amending Waste Discharge Requirements Order R5-2010-0114-02 (NPDES No. CA0077682) for Sacramento Regional County Sanitation District, Sacramento Regional Wastewater Treatment Plant, Sacramento County.

Dear Mr. Marshall:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) submits the following comments and recommendations on the Tentative Order amending the interim ammonia effluent limitations for the Sacramento Regional County Sanitation District's (Regional San) Sacramento Regional Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) during the 30-day open public comment period.

In 2010, the Service worked with Regional San and California Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Board) in development of their National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit (Permit) to ensure that effluent limitations for any and all potential pollutants (including ammonia) were sufficiently protective of listed species and their habitat, specifically for the delta smelt (*Hypomesus transpacificus*), which is protected under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (Act). The Service concurred that the Permit's interim and final ammonia limits, as specified, were those necessary to achieve applicable water quality objectives and minimize adverse effects on aquatic life including delta smelt. The Service's San Francisco Bay-Delta Fish and Wildlife Office (BDFWO) issued a letter of support for the Permit on October 6, 2010. The Service acknowledges the WWTP did not have any set ammonia limits in its previous NPDES permits (i.e., those prior to 2010) and that the WWTP facility did not have a history of violating water quality criteria for ammonia in the Sacramento River, at or below its point of discharge.

The Service understands the technological limitation of the current treatment chain and the exacerbation of effluent ammonia from existing drought conditions. There is, however, concern that several factors could in the present circumstances contribute to chronically-toxic ammonia conditions in the Sacramento River just downstream of the outfall. Those factors include: drought-related low river discharge, seasonally higher temperatures, and the proposed elevated

ammonia effluent amounts which, alone or in combination, may collectively result in ammonia toxicity for fish and other aquatic resources. This is of particular concern to the Service because the Sacramento River at Freeport is within delta smelt designated critical habitat.

Due to concerns regarding possible adverse water quality conditions in the Sacramento River, Leanna Zweig of my staff contacted you on June 9, 2014, to request additional information on this issue. The Service requested that available monitoring data, effluent modeling for the 2010 permit, 2013 EPA ammonia criteria, and delta smelt-relevant toxicity data be evaluated to determine if the amended limitations are protective of the aquatic life beneficial use, delta smelt and other federally-listed aquatic species. Thank you for being responsive to our concerns and receptive of our information request. The Service will continue to work with you and Regional San to model Sacramento River water quality which would result from the amended ammonia effluent limits.

Due to time restraints it is unlikely that the evaluation will be completed by the close of the current public comment period. This letter is intended to provide acknowledgement and appreciation for your efforts to date, and to request continued engagement by Regional Board staff and Regional San to address our concerns.

In particular, should modeling show that Sacramento River ammonia could closely approach or exceed established toxicological thresholds, we request that you and Regional San continue to work with the Service to reduce Sacramento River ammonia conditions where possible. Should the Regional Board determine that Regional San is taking all feasible actions to reduce ammonia in their effluent, and that amended interim limits are necessary until the completion of the upgrades in 2021, the Service requests that additional water quality monitoring (ammonia, pH and temperature) be added to the Permit in order to document the dynamics of the ammonia plume downstream of the point of release. These data will help us develop a better understanding of the extent, magnitude, and duration of any adverse impacts the releases may be having to aquatic life, and specifically to any federally-listed species in the reach of the Sacramento River below Freeport. We are available to engage in a discussion of the objectives and design of such enhanced monitoring at an appropriate time.

The Service appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Tentative Order amending the 2010 Permit. If you have any questions or comments about this letter, please contact Leanna Zweig of my staff at (916) 930-5631. We also request that you please include the BDFWO (at leanna_zweig@fws.gov) on the distribution list for all further notices related to the Sacramento Regional Wastewater Treatment Plant NPDES permit, and proposed amendments.

Sincerely,


Larry Rabin
Acting Field Supervisor