

INPUT REGARDING TRINITY FOR BAY-DELTA HEARINGS

Construction of Trinity Dam and the associated features comprising the Trinity River Division, Central Valley Project began in 1955. The project was completed and the export of Trinity River water to the Sacramento Valley was begun in 1963.

During initial years of operation, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (BR) diverted an average of 1.2 million acre-feet of water annually from the upper Trinity River basin to the Sacramento Valley. Except during the four years (1978-1981) following the 1975-1977 drought, Trinity diversions to the Central Valley have consistently exceeded 1,000,000 acre-feet annually.

In March 1959, BR and the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) signed an operating agreement providing for year-around water releases ranging from 150 to 250 cfs for fish maintenance downstream from Lewiston Dam. Scheduled releases under that agreement were modified in 1968 to better accommodate spawning king salmon. The total amount of water called for under the 1968 modification (120,300 acre-feet) represented approximately 10% of the historic (1911-1960) annual flow at Lewiston of 1,188,000 acre-feet.

In the two decades following the 1963 initiation of water diversions to the Central Valley, a number of major environmental changes adversely affecting anadromous fish populations occurred in the main Trinity River downstream from Lewiston Dam. Concomittantly, annual numbers of steelhead and fall chinook, the two principal anadromous stocks in the basin, returning to the Trinity plummeted.

Developing anadromous fish problems in the Trinity below Lewiston Dam associated with Trinity River Division operations were identified as early as 1967, when the California Legislature directed the Resources Agency to establish a Task Force to address sedimentation problems developing in the river below the dam.

Findings developed by the Sedimentation Task Force, and those of the subsequently formed 13-agency Trinity River Basin Fish and Wildlife Task Force, resulted in identification of insufficient stream flows below Lewiston Dam as the probable number one limiting factor impacting the Trinity's salmon and steelhead resources.

Based on the findings, which were collated in the November 1980 Environmental Impact Statement on the Management of River Flows to Mitigate the Loss of the Anadromous Fishery of the Trinity River California, then-Secretary of the Interior Cecil Andrus, on January 14, 1981, signed a decision document providing for increased flow releases from Lewiston Dam into the Trinity River: 340,000 acre-feet in all but dry and critically dry years; 220,000 acre-feet in dry years; and 140,000 acre-feet in critically dry years.

Andrus' decision, in addition to allocating 340,000 acre-feet of water to the Trinity River below Lewiston Dam, called for a 12-year evaluation by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) of the increased releases' impacts on the Trinity's anadromous fish resources. This study is now in its third year. At conclusion of the study, FWS, after consultation with CDFG and BR, will report to the Interior Secretary on the effectiveness of the increased flows, and other habitat restoration measures, in restoring/maintaining the Trinity's salmon and steelhead stocks. The FWS report will specifically address the adequacy of salmon/steelhead habitat at several pre-selected annual release levels for all water year types, and the need to maintain, increase, or decrease the full 340,000 acre-feet water allocation.

In deliberating future water needs for the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, it is imperative that thought be given to upstream needs as well. This is especially true as regards the Trinity River system. Meeting of Delta outflow needs must not be at the expense of the Trinity, or other upstream areas.

Accordingly, CDFG most strongly recommends that the 340,000 acre-feet allocation made in the January 14, 1981, Secretarial Decision Document be recognized and acknowledged as a firm and long-term minimum commitment to the Trinity River, and that this yield be considered not available for use under any circumstances in meeting water requirements at any point in the Central Valley.

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