

Update on communications with National Marine Fisheries Services (NMFS) to develop a new classification of winter reservoir releases beneficial to the recharge of the Salinas Valley Groundwater Basin.

RECOMMENDATION:

None – item presented for informational purposes.

SUMMARY/DISCUSSION:

The Monterey County Water Resources Agency (Agency) and NMFS have met several times since late 2016 to discuss potential winter releases from Nacimiento Reservoir that are outside the *Salinas Valley Water Project Flow Prescription for Steelhead Trout in the Salinas River* (flow prescription), dated October 2005. These releases would be intended to enhance winter flows in the Salinas River to assist steelhead migration opportunities after consecutive dry winters.

At its January 26, 2018 meeting and following a recommendation from the Reservoir Operations Advisory Committee, the Agency Board of Directors directed Agency staff to engage with NMFS staff to develop a new classification of winter release that would allow groundwater recharge in the basin without the requirement of contiguous flows to the lagoon.

On February 14, 2018, Agency staff teleconferenced with NMFS staff to discuss the possibility of making releases this winter to benefit groundwater recharge in the basin without meeting the Salinas Valley Water Project Biological Opinion (BO) requirement of contiguous flow in the river, with at least 2 cubic feet per second reaching the Salinas River Lagoon. NMFS staff reiterated that, this would be an operation outside the parameters of the BO and the Agency does not have take coverage for this type of operation. NMFS stated, the regulatory mechanism for the requested activity is not in place, and without a thorough analysis, there could be detrimental impacts to the environment. NMFS staff stated that a winter release strategy to provide benefit to steelhead, along with groundwater recharge should be explored going forward as part of the development of a Habitat Conservation Plan.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

National Marine Fisheries Services

FINANCING:

None

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Attachments: None