THE METROPOLITAN WATER DISTRICT OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Report

Office of the General Manager

• Bay-Delta Management Report

Summary

This report provides a summary of activities related to the Bay-Delta for March 2023.

Purpose

Informational

Detailed Report

Delta Conveyance

The public comment period for the Delta Conveyance Project Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) closed on December 16, 2022. The Department of Water Resources (DWR) received more than 700 unique comment letters with over 6,000 individual comments. DWR is continuing efforts to organize the comments and develop responses. The Final EIR is expected at the end of 2023and will include responses to all substantive comments on the Draft EIR edits, as appropriate, to respond to the comments.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), as part of its permitting review under the Clean Water Act and Rivers and Harbors Act, released a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act for a public review that ended on March 16. USACE is starting the initial organization of the comments received.

Sites Reservoir

In their March joint meetings, the Sites Project Authority Board (Authority Board) and the Sites Reservoir Committee (Reservoir Committee) authorized the submittal of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (USEPA) Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) application. Although the application does not constitute commitment to a WIFIA loan, it does initiate an approximate 12-month negotiation process with the USEPA regarding the loan agreement. After receiving the application, USEPA WIFIA staff will begin an in-depth review of the Sites Reservoir Project (Project) and the Sites Authority's credit.

The Reservoir Committee and Authority Board also approved the submittal of the California Independent System Operator (CAISO) interconnection request application. The Project will require power for day-to-day operations and will generate incidental power upon releases of water from the reservoir, which is expected to offset about half of the power needs. The proposed interconnection request would put the project into the long line of requests and initiate a lengthy study process that can take more than two years to complete. By interconnecting with CAISO directly, the Project would have the ability to engage in the wholesale electrical energy market, which has the potential to be more cost-effective than going through Pacific Gas & Electric.

Near-Term Delta Actions

Regulatory Activities

Staff continued to participate in the collaborative science groups set up to inform implementation of the 2019 Biological Opinions (BiOp) for the State Water Project (SWP) and Central Valley Project, and the 2020 Incidental Take Permit (ITP) for long-term operation of the SWP. In March, staff participated in Delta Coordination Group meetings with state and federal water contractors, resource agencies, and fisheries agencies to develop tentative recommendations on the implementation of Summer Fall Habitat Actions for Delta Smelt as mandated by the BiOp and ITP. Recommendations are tentative as water year designation is not yet official and the actions are contingent on water year type.

Staff is participating on a Science Committee developing the Voluntary Agreement Science Plan. This plan provides the framework and specific approach for evaluating the outcomes of the flow and non-flow measures

proposed as part of the Voluntary Agreements for the Sacramento River, Delta, and Tributary update to the San Francisco Bay/Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Water Quality Control Plan. The science plan builds on an initial framework describing the metrics, monitoring, and outcomes for Voluntary Agreement commitment actions provided to the State Water Resources Control Board in October 2022, and provides additional detail on the hypotheses, metrics, existing monitoring programs, and the approach for analyses that will be leveraged for understanding outcomes of Voluntary Agreement actions.

Ecosystem Restoration

The Delta Stewardship Council is working with diverse groups of interests to develop a draft Adaptation Strategy for the Delta Adapts Initiative, which is focused on understanding climate change risks in the Delta and developing adaptation strategies. Staff participated in the Delta Adapts Ecosystem Focus Group #3 on March 13, which focused on presenting ecosystem adaptation scenarios and refining criteria that will be used to prioritize projects in the Delta region.

Delta Island Activities

Staff is working internally to coordinate submission of a full grant application to the Delta Conservancy's Nature Based Solutions: Wetland Restoration Grant Program for a $20 million grant that will fund development of a mosaic of managed flooded wetlands and rice fields on Webb Tract to stop subsidence, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and generate income from carbon credits and lease agreements. Staff plans to update the Board at the April 2023 Bay-Delta Subcommittee meeting. The Delta Conservancy Board will consider the Webb Tract grant application at their July 2023 board meeting.

Quarterly Bay-Delta Science Update

Metropolitan's Bay-Delta Science Program is directed at supporting strong science for protecting the Bay-Delta environment, driving better management decisions, and supporting effective regulations. The following summary of Bay-Delta Science activities provides key highlights for the period January 1 to March 31, 2023.

Staff will continue to provide this report on a quarterly basis in the Bay Delta Management Report.

Bay-Delta Science Update, January - March 2023

Science Objective	Accomplishments
Collaborative Science	Staff continued participating in the Collaborative Science and Adaptive Management Program (CSAMP) with state and federal agencies, water agencies and the NGO environmental community. Key progress this quarter focused on efforts to facilitate recovery planning for salmon. Reorienting to Salmonid Recovery Project – Staff efforts focused on planning and initiating Phase 3 of the project which includes developing an agreed-upon suite of priorities for salmonid recovery. Phase 3 will use an iterative approach with participants and modelers to review and refine recovery scenarios, run simplified models, and review preliminary results, allowing ample opportunity for refinement of scenarios before final model runs are conducted. Staff is organizing intensive workshops for participants to work in groups using web applications developed to evaluate model output sensitivity to different salmonid management scenarios. These online tools will help participants better understand and address the trade-offs associated with different suites of recovery actions. The first workshop was held in March, and two to four additional workshops will be held between May and December 2023.
Science Investigations	Staff continued to collaborate with university researchers, science experts, and state and federal agencies to carry out science studies. Staff attended the 2023 Interagency Ecological Program Annual Workshop March 21-23. The workshop included sessions on native fish species in the Delta, habitat restoration, water quality, food web, and invasive aquatic plants. The workshop included multiple presentations and posters reporting on collaborative science

Science Objective	Accomplishments
	studies between Metropolitan and state and federal agencies, university researchers, and consulting experts. Staff co-authored poster presentations on Delta smelt supplementation research, longfin smelt entrainment risk, and pathogen exposure for out-migrating salmon.
Innovation	Staff worked with researchers from UC Davis to conduct the Delta Smelt Pilot Propagation study. The study is using impoundments on Bouldin Island to conduct a proof-of-concept study by placing hatchery Delta smelt in enclosures in the impoundments and monitoring their condition. The first deployment was completed in January 2023, and the study successfully demonstrated impoundments as a viable tool for aquaculture of Delta smelt on Metropolitan's Delta Islands properties in the effort to produce more Delta smelt for supplementation into the wild. The second deployment of Delta smelt to the impoundments was initiated in February 2023. The objective of the second study is to repeat and verify the results and test conditions during a warmer period. Staff conducted field sampling of the Delta smelt in the study impoundments in March. The fish appear to be thriving with good survival and growth.
Delta Science Community	Staff participated in a decision analysis tools training through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Conservation Training Center to develop a greater practical understanding of the most common quantitative methods. These skills help support evaluation of the consequences and tradeoffs among alternatives of any decision problem.