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STATE WATER RESOURCES CONTROL BOARD RESOLUTION NO. 2023-

APPROVING THE FINAL INITIAL BIOLOGICAL GOALS FOR LOWER SAN JOAQUIN RIVER FLOW OBJECTIVES

WHEREAS:

1. The State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board or Board) and the nine regional water quality control boards administer the Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act (Wat. Code, § 13000 et seq.) (Porter-Cologne Act) to achieve an effective water quality control program for the state and are responsible for the regulation of activities and factors that may affect the quality of the waters of the state. (Wat. Code, §§ 13000, 13001.)
2. The State Water Board is authorized to adopt a water quality control plan in accordance with the provisions of Water Code sections 13240 through 13244, insofar as they are applicable. (Wat. Code, § 13170.)
3. The State Water Board adopted amendments to the Water Quality Control Plan for the San Francisco Bay/Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Estuary (Bay-Delta Plan or Plan) for Lower San Joaquin River (LSJR) flows for the protection of fish and wildlife, as well updates for southern Delta salinity for the protection of agriculture, under its water quality authority on December 12, 2018. The Bay-Delta Plan establishes water quality objectives for the reasonable protection of beneficial uses in the San Francisco Bay/Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Estuary (Bay-Delta) and a program of implementation to achieve the objectives. Diversions of water within and upstream of the Bay-Delta are a driver of water quality in the Bay-Delta. As a result, much of the implementation for the Bay-Delta Plan relies upon the combined water rights and water quality authorities of the State Water Board.
4. The 2018 LSJR flow amendments to the Bay-Delta Plan Program of Implementation requires that biological goals be developed and used to: inform adaptive methods for the LSJR flows; evaluate the effectiveness of the program of implementation; inform the San Joaquin River Monitoring and Evaluation Program (SJRMEP); and inform future changes to the Bay-Delta Plan. Biological goals are quantitative metrics that the State Water Board will use to assess if the actions it is taking under the Bay-Delta Plan, and in coordination with state agencies and other entities to implement the Plan, are making sufficient progress towards the Bay-Delta Plan's narrative LSJR flow and salmon protection objectives calling for the maintenance of viable native fish and aquatic species populations and the doubling of salmon populations.

DRAFT

The biological goals are developed for LSJR salmonids: abundance; productivity as measured by population growth rate; genetic and life history diversity; and population spatial extent, distribution, and structure. The biological goals are expressed in terms that are specific, measurable, achievable, result-focused, and time bound.

5. The initial biological goals were developed with recommendations from an Independent Science Advisory Panel convened by the Delta Science Program, Stanislaus, Tuolumne, and Merced River (STM) Working Group members, and the public. The Draft Final Biological Goals for the Lower San Joaquin River report is the fourth iteration of the report which incorporates input and recommendations in the form of written comments and a March 2019 Independent Science Advisory Panel Workshop, an August 2019 Staff Technical Workshop, four STM Working Group technical meetings (November and December 2019 and March and April 2023), and a May 2023 Board Public Workshop.
6. The initial biological goals were developed using the best available science as indicators for measuring progress toward the doubling of salmon populations and maintaining viable native fish populations. The biological goals were developed as benchmarks to measure responses in multiple salmonid life stages, spatial reaches, and temporal scales. Biological goals will be used for measuring biological responses to both flow and non-flow changes to habitat quality and quantity.
7. The Bay-Delta Plan LSJR flow objectives focus on improvements to the salmonid life stages that occur in the tributaries, for example, spawning, egg viability, and juvenile survival; however, many out-of-basin factors also impact salmonid population survival and abundance. The achievement of some biological goals will require a combination of tributary flow management and other out-of-basin actions, such as LSJR and Delta water rights and water quality actions, fisheries management, hatchery management reform, and habitat restoration.
8. The State Water Board will use the biological goals to inform the development of the SJRMEP. Many of the components of the biological goals are currently measured and reported; however, a comprehensive monitoring program to measure and assess all components of the biological goals has not yet been established. Pursuant to its authorities, including Water Code section 13165, the Bay-Delta Plan requires comprehensive monitoring to address both the individual and cumulative impacts of diversions and discharges to fish and wildlife beneficial uses. The Bay-Delta Plan, at a minimum, requires the following:

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- a. Monitoring, special studies, and evaluations of the effects of flow and other factors on viability of native LSJR watershed fish populations throughout the year, including assessment of abundance, spatial extent (or distribution), diversity (both genetic and life history), and productivity.
 - b. The consideration of monitoring recommendations from entities with relevant Central Valley monitoring plans to improve standardization of methods, including the quantification of confidence, bias, and precision of population estimates.
 - c. Regular external scientific review of monitoring, evaluation, reporting, and special studies.
9. Adoption of Final Initial Biological Goals for the Lower San Joaquin River is not a “project” within the meaning of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and is therefore not subject to CEQA because this action does not have the potential for resulting in either a direct physical change in the environment, or a reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment. (Cal.Code Regs., tit. 14, § 15378, subd. (a).) The State Water Board previously approved amendments to the Bay-Delta Plan in 2018 that included a program of implementation with provisions for the development of biological goals.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

The State Water Board:

1. Approves the Final Initial Biological Goals for the Lower San Joaquin River for abundance, productivity, diversity, and spatial structure as identified in Chapter 3 of the Final Initial Biological Goals for the Lower San Joaquin River Report and in Tables 3-1, 3-2, 3-3, 3-5, 3-9, 3-10, and 3-11 and Section 3.4.
2. Directs staff to review the approved biological goals at least every five years and, as appropriate, revise biological goals to reflect updated scientific knowledge and to be consistent with best available scientific information, including: information developed from assessing approved biological goals, information regarding viable salmonid populations, recovery plans for listed salmonids, traditional ecological knowledge, or other appropriate and relevant information source.

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3. Directs Board staff to continue coordinating with the STM Working Group regarding monitoring, evaluation, review, and potential update of biological goals, consistent with the Bay-Delta Plan.

4. Directs staff to coordinate with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries, and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service to evaluate the impact of hatchery management on the viability of natural salmon production and identify potential hatchery management reform, including long-term funding options, that reduces the impact of hatchery origin spawner straying, prioritizes data availability of the contribution of hatchery origin spawners to escapement, and improves, as necessary, the certainty of the hatchery fish marking program.

CERTIFICATION

The undersigned Clerk to the Board does hereby certify that the foregoing is a full, true, and correct copy of a resolution duly and regularly adopted at a meeting of the State Water Resources Control Board held on September 6, 2023.

Courtney Tyler
Clerk to the Board