

TEHAMA COLUSA CANAL AUTHORITY

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TEHAMA COLUSA CANAL AUTHORITY MOVES TO INTERVENE IN CASE REGARDING INADEQUACY OF THE 2004 BIOLOGICAL OPINION ON CENTRAL VALLEY PROJECT OPERATIONS

The Tehama Colusa Canal Authority (TCCA) announces that it is moving to intervene as a party to the federal court proceeding for the Endangered Species Act Biological Opinion for Central Valley Project operations. On April 16, 2008, U.S. District Judge Oliver W. Wanger found that the 2004 study by the National Marine Fisheries Service did not adequately address a number of factors which could cause the extinction of endangered salmon and steelhead, including loss of critical habitat, explanation of contradictory evidence, and global warming.

The Red Bluff Diversion Dam (RBDD), the Tehama-Colusa Canal, and the Corning Canal were authorized as a part the Central Valley Project (CVP) to provide irrigation water throughout four Northern California counties (Tehama, Glenn, Colusa, and Yolo). This 140 mile long, dual-canal system enables the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to deliver water to the 18 member districts of the TCCA. The system meets the needs of over 150,000 acres of irrigated farm and ranch lands along the west side of the Sacramento Valley, and supports a variety of crops that annually contribute over \$1 billion to regional economic activity.

A significant portion of the Sacramento River spawning habitat for endangered salmon and steelhead occurs upstream of the RBDD. The RBDD currently operates on a four-month gates-in period to allow gravity diversion to the canals during the irrigation season, and to provide unimpeded fish passage during the remainder of the year. The National Marine Fisheries Service predicts that an updated Biological Opinion for CVP operations will be complete by March 2009. Judge Wanger has set a hearing for June 6, 2008 to determine if interim changes to CVP operations may be needed. In a preliminary filing on April 24, 2008, the plaintiffs listed five areas on which the Court should focus, including operation of the RBDD.

In 2002 the TCCA, in partnership with the Bureau of Reclamation, began work on options to improve fish passage and enhance water supply reliability. After looking at over 100 alternatives, the TCCA and the Bureau of Reclamation are close to selecting a

preferred alternative that would decrease reliance on the gravity diversion, and instead rely on the installation of a pumping plant that would lift water out of the river through a state-of-the-art fish screen.

Ken LaGrande, Chairman of the TCCA Board, stated, *“The Authority is extremely concerned about a potential reduction in gate operations. Any action that further reduces the timeframe during which the TCCA can divert water from the river would be catastrophic for the farms and communities reliant on those deliveries.”*

“We have a solution at the Red Bluff Diversion Dam that works for both fish and farms and appeal to our federal partners to move expeditiously towards developing that solution. Ten years of study is enough; it is time to implement.”

“The current situation is clear evidence that the conflict between fish passage and agricultural water deliveries could soon cause a preventable water crisis in the northern Sacramento Valley that could dwarf the one that occurred in the Klamath Basin,” LaGrande continued.

“A long-term solution at Red Bluff is our highest priority and the Authority looks forward to implementing the Fish Passage Improvement Project as soon as possible,” LaGrande concluded.

The plaintiff coalition that launched the legal challenge includes: Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations and the Institute for Fisheries Resources, The Bay Institute, Baykeeper, California Trout, Friends of the River, Natural Resources Defense Council, Northern California Council of the Federation of Fly Fishers, and the Winnemem Wintu Tribe.

Additional information on the RBDD can be found at www.usbr.gov/dataweb/html/sacramento.html.
