

Reclamation has shared a draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for “*Initial Actions for the Reinitiation of Consultation on the Coordinated Long-term Operation of the Central Valley Project and State Water Project*”. The EA states that, based on Reclamation’s interpretation of recent science, the Proposed Action will not create “...additional adverse effects to listed species beyond those analyzed in the 2008 and 2009 [Biological Opinions]...”. NMFS, however, has concerns that many of the proposed elements may not meet this standard.

For example, the EA proposes the following operation in lieu of the Action IV.2.1 (the I:E ratio action) in the Reasonable and Prudent Alternative (RPA) of the NMFS 2009 Biological Opinion on the long-term operations of the Central Valley Project (CVP) and State Water Project (SWP; 2009 NMFS BiOp):

- Operate to a 1:1 Inflow to export ratio for all Water Year Hydrologic Classifications in the San Joaquin Valley including transfers, as measured as a 3-day running average at Vernalis on the San Joaquin River.

A broader range of alternatives in the NEPA process is important to avoid delays if, during the ESA consultation on near-term actions, some adjustments to the proposed action are made. Below the California Central Valley Office (CCVO) shares some potential alternatives to be considered in the EA.

CCVO IDEAS FOR ALTERNATIVES TO THE I:E RATIO IN ACTION IV.2.1

(The current implementation of Action IV.2.1 (I:E ratio varies by San Joaquin yeartype; Heald of Old River Barrier is installed when possible) is covered by the “No Action Alternative”

1. Operationalize/streamline WIIN Section 4001 I:E flex on transfers, voluntary sales, and releases, as long as water is “additional to that which would otherwise occur [at Vernalis]”.
2. Implement the April-May OMR restrictions in the PA (summarized in BA Table 3.3-1 in Appendix A2 of the California Water Fix Biological Opinion; excerpted below)
Allowable OMR flows depend on gaged flow measured at Vernalis¹, and will be determined by a linear relationship. If Vernalis flow is below 5,000 cfs, OMR flows will not be more negative than -2000 cfs. If Vernalis is 6,000 cfs, OMR flows will not be less than +1000 cfs. If Vernalis is 10,000 cfs, OMR flows will not be less than +2,000 cfs. If Vernalis is 15,000 cfs, OMR flows will not be less than +3,000 cfs. If Vernalis is at or exceeds 30,000 cfs, OMR flows will not be less than 6,000 cfs.
3. Implement RPA Action IV.2.1 as written except when flows at Vernalis are in excess of 6,000 cfs, regardless of water year type, then exports can go to 1:1. However HORB must be installed when exporting at 1:1 (installed prior to allowing flows to go to 6,000 or higher at VNS. *[HORB can’t be constructed at flows over 5,000 cfs; can operate up to 10,000 cfs]*

¹ When OMR target is based on Vernalis flow, will be a function of 5-day average measured flow.

Measures to reduce risk of additional adverse effects to listed species due to modifications to implementation of Action IV.2.1, or increase learning, or both:

4. Preferential pumping through the CVP.
5. Increase San Joaquin River flows.
6. Consider diurnal radial gate operations to minimized opening during the daytime (ideally, linked with study to determine whether listed species are more active at night near the facilities)
7. Establish steelhead-based loss triggers to either offramp the alternative implementation or require an OMR action response (for example something like 4 and 8 fish/TAF instead of the 8 and 12 fish/TAF² in Action IV.2.3 of the 2009 NMFS BiOp) to protect Southern Sierra Diversity Group Steelhead moving through the Old River corridor route.
8. Design an experiment to go along with flexed operations, as in the 2012 Joint Stipulation.
9. Improve habitat within the Delta
10. If the fish collection facility is undergoing maintenance and salvage is not 100% functional, then exports should be reduced or steelhead loss density triggers made more sensitive.

² listed as daily loss limits in Action IV.2.3, but are effectively 8 fish/TAF and 12 fish/TAF