



To: Stakeholders

From: Regional Directors and Directors from Reclamation, FWS, NMFS, DWR, and CDFW

Date: December 12, 2014

Subject: **Memorandum Regarding a draft Interagency Drought Strategy and Upcoming Outreach Timeline**

This week brings sorely needed and significant precipitation to California. But similar levels of rain and snow would have to fall in California consistently throughout this winter and spring for the state to begin to recover from extreme drought conditions.

We must prepare for the worst and assume that dry conditions will continue, and so we are planning to manage the Central Valley Project and State Water Project through a fourth year of drought.

To that end, please find attached the draft Interagency 2015 Drought Strategy. This draft strategy is an initial framework of anticipated drought response actions.

Our five agencies are the United States Department of the Interior Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) and Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), the United States Department of Commerce National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), the California Department of Water Resources (DWR), and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW). Together, these agencies are primarily involved in the operation and regulation of the federal Central Valley Project (CVP) and State Water Project (SWP).

This Interagency 2015 Drought Strategy is not a final document intended to govern CVP and SWP operations, nor is it a formal submission to any agency with approval authority. Instead, it outlines possible upcoming drought response actions and seeks to inform stakeholders and the general public about the five agencies' planning efforts for a fourth year of drought.

We begin discussions about our drought response planning earlier than last year because of two lessons we learned in 2014. First, managing an extreme drought is best done by state and federal agencies working in real-time with affected stakeholders to rapidly and equitably balance between all of the competing needs for limited water. Second, we must leave sufficient time for feedback and input from diverse stakeholders, many of who have substantial on-the-ground expertise in water management.

The draft Interagency 2015 Drought Strategy includes:

- a Drought Contingency Plan for Operations of the SWP and CVP;
- a Drought Monitoring Plan; and
- other 2015 Drought-Related Measures

These components are intended to be used where appropriate to inform the agencies' drought response efforts. Our agencies welcome feedback on this draft Interagency 2015 Drought Strategy throughout December 2014 and early 2015. This feedback will inform development of the subsequent, more detailed document 2015 Drought Contingency Plan required by the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) as part of its Temporary Urgency Change order dated October 7, 2014. DWR and Reclamation will complete the 2015 Drought Contingency Plan in coordination with NMFS, FWS, and CDFW; for submission to the State Water Resources Control Board by January 15, 2015. This submittal will be more specific and will contain forecasted operations based on existing storage and projected hydrology as required the Board order. In addition, the January plan will be accompanied by a biological review of all effects of these planned operations to listed fish, and will serve as the basis for formal authorization of these actions under the Endangered Species Act. Beginning next week, our regional senior management teams will coordinate with stakeholders to develop the 2015 Drought Contingency Plan to be submitted to the State Water Board.

The importance of our agencies' efforts in the face of a fourth year of drought to minimize potential impacts to food security, economic stability and species protection cannot be overstated. With this strategy, we seek to improve operational flexibility of the CVP and SWP to support water supplies while minimizing the adverse effects of the drought on imperiled species and water quality. In addition, we intend to pursue water re-use and promote conservation efforts where appropriate to make the most use of limited supplies.

The past water year was profoundly difficult for all involved in CVP and SWP operational decisions affecting agricultural, municipal, and rural communities, as well as fish and wildlife, public health, and safety. We are acutely aware of the concerns expressed to us from the perspectives of the many different stakeholders about last year's CVP and SWP operations. We have included a summary of the key lessons learned during 2014 in managing this extreme drought and thank every individual and group who worked collaboratively with our agencies this past year. We seek similar collaboration while working on the 2015 Drought Contingency Plan.

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