

Tehama Colusa Canal Authority

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U.S. BUREAU OF RECLAMATION SIGNS RECORD OF DECISION IN MAJOR STEP FORWARD FOR RED BLUFF DIVERSION DAM FISH PASSAGE IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

After eight years of intensive evaluation and study, on July 16, 2008, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) signed a Record of Decision (ROD) under the National Environmental Policy Act finalizing the combined Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Red Bluff Diversion Dam Fish Passage Improvement Project. In 2000 the Tehama-Colusa Canal Authority (TCCA), in partnership with Reclamation, began analysis of options to improve fish passage and enhance water supply reliability for TCCA's customers. After examining over 100 alternatives, the TCCA and Reclamation selected a preferred alternative that calls for the installation of a pumping plant that will lift water out of the river through a state-of-the-art fish screen. The TCCA certified the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) under the California Environmental Quality Act on June 4, 2008.

The ROD comes after over 40 years of efforts by various entities to find a balanced solution that serves both fish passage and irrigation water deliveries. The formal selection of a preferred alternative is especially timely as the TCCA recently defended the diversion dam in a case pending in the federal court in Fresno against efforts to raise the dam gates allegedly to improve passage for the federally endangered spring-run Chinook salmon. If the gates had been raised, the 150,000 acres of irrigated farm and ranch lands in the TCCA service area along the west side of the Sacramento Valley would likely have been dried up, destroying an estimated \$250 million of crop production.

On April 16, 2008, U.S. District Judge Oliver W. Wanger found that the 2004 Biological Opinion of the National Marine Fisheries Service for Central Valley Project (CVP) operations was legally inadequate in some respects. Ironically, the Judge determined that the Biological Opinion's treatment of the diversion dam met the dictates of the law. Nonetheless, the Judge found that the study by the National Marine Fisheries Service didn't adequately address global warming, the loss of critical habitat, and other factors that could hurt endangered salmon and steelhead. The National Marine Fisheries Service predicts that a new Biological Opinion for CVP operations will be complete by March 2009. The new Biological Opinion will determine gate operations at the dam

beginning next spring. Ideally, the Biological Opinion would allow for continued gate operations until the pumping plant is completed.

Design and construction of the pumping plant, that will protect both fish and farmers, will likely take three years. Ken LaGrande, Chairman of the TCCA Board, stated, *"We are ecstatic that Reclamation has signed the ROD, and that the TCCA has certified the EIR. This clears the path for us to move forward with acquiring funding for design and construction of the project."*

"We're not out of the dark yet though because the new Biological Opinion could include reduced gate operations before there is time to build the pumping plant," LaGrande continued. *"And, in these days of concerns about rising food prices and the environmental impact of reliance on imported commodities, it is imperative that we protect the production of the wide variety of food grown in our own Sacramento Valley with a project like this. "*

A significant portion of the Sacramento River spawning habitat for endangered salmon and steelhead occurs upstream of the diversion dam. Currently the diversion dam 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 dam gates will likely be raised this year on September 2, two weeks earlier than usual, in an effort to provide improved upstream migration for adult fall-run Chinook salmon. The fall-run are not federally listed as threatened or endangered, but the 2008 closure of commercial fishery on the California coast was due to an unprecedented collapse of the fall-run salmon population. *"Anything that the TCCA can do to assist in offsetting the ocean conditions that most scientists attribute to the fall-run salmon numbers makes sense to our farmers,"* said LaGrande.

The Red Bluff Diversion Dam, the Tehama-Colusa Canal, and the Corning Canal were authorized as a part the Central Valley Project to provide irrigation water in four Northern California counties (Tehama, Glenn, Colusa, and Yolo). This 140 mile long, dual-canal system enables the delivery of water to the 18 member districts of the TCCA. The system supports a variety of crops that contribute over \$1 billion to the regional economy annually. Additional information on the RBDD can be found at www.usbr.gov/dataweb/html/sacramento.html.

The TCCA is a joint powers authority formed in 1987. It operates and maintains the Corning and Tehama-Colusa Canals, features of the federal Central Valley Project, under an agreement with Reclamation. The costs of the operations are paid by the water users of the 18 member districts, each of which holds a contract for CVP water from Reclamation.
