



Fact Sheet

State Water Board Adopts Revised Order for Cachuma Project in Santa Barbara County

Order Will Improve Water Conditions for Survival of Migrating Fish

Overview

[A Board-approved order issued Sept. 17, 2019](#) will increase the instream flow requirements (in the Bureau of Reclamation's water rights) downstream of [Lake Cachuma in Santa Barbara County](#) for the protection of fish, possibly reducing the water supply for communities that rely on the lake. The revised document addresses injury resulting from construction and operation of Bradbury Dam to senior water right holders and public trust resources such as the endangered species Southern California steelhead. Additionally, the Board granted Reclamation's request and changed the permits' purposes and places of use. The order is based on evidence and testimony presented at multiple hearings spanning more than a decade.

Historical Role of the State Water Boards

Built in 1956 by Reclamation and consisting of Bradbury Dam and Cachuma Reservoir, the project captures the seasonal floodwaters for use by communities in Santa Barbara County. It serves approximately 150,000 people between the Santa Ynez Mountains and the Pacific Coast, including those in Santa Barbara, Goleta, Montecito, Summerland and Carpinteria, and another 13,000 in Santa Ynez, Los Olivos, Ballard and Solvang.

Since the State Water Board issued the water right permits to Reclamation in 1958, the Board has retained the authority to determine the requirements necessary to protect senior water rights and public trust resources downstream of Bradbury Dam, including the endangered steelhead fishery.

What the Draft Order Requires

It amends the terms and conditions of Reclamation's water right permits for the project to protect the steelhead fishery and other public trust resources. The updated order also incorporates conditions of an existing settlement agreement that protects more senior downstream water right holders from injury due to changes in water quality or a reduction in the quantity of available water.



Revisions to the place and purposes of use were approved because they were not found to affect the project's operations or flows in the Santa Ynez River.

The State Water Board determined that the steelhead fishery in the Santa Ynez River is not in good condition, as required by the public trust doctrine and Fish and Game Code section 5937, and that additional measures are needed to increase the amount of suitable habitat available for spawning and rearing above the dam. The evidence shows that damming the Santa Ynez River, the most productive steelhead river in Southern California, reduced the annual steelhead run from a historic average of 20,000 adult fish to fewer than 100. Loss of instream rearing habitat for juvenile steelhead is a lead cause of the steelhead population's decline.

The Board's action further requires Reclamation to conduct studies of additional measures that could be implemented to keep the steelhead fishery in good condition at the individual, population and community level. Specifically, the order requires Reclamation to evaluate the following: Opportunities to provide passage of steelhead above and below Bradbury Dam; instream flow measures for the protection of steelhead and other native aquatic species in the Santa Ynez River; measures to reduce impacts of predation and other species on steelhead and other native aquatic species; and improvements or restoration of stream and streamside habitat.

Draft Order Requires the Following Steps

To improve conditions for the steelhead and minimize water supply impacts, the project's requirements to meet a certain amount of flow in the river ("instream flow") would depend on the hydrologic conditions that are present. In years when the runoff is determined to be below normal, dry, or critical, the criteria for instream flow requirements would be the same as the existing operating criteria in the National Marine Fisheries Service's 2000 Biological Opinion. In years when the runoff into the Cachuma Reservoir is determined to be wet or above normal, the instream flow conditions would be greater.

Reclamation will be required to study the impact of the increased flows on steelhead. The order reserves the State Water Board's continuing authority to flexibly manage the increased flows with input from the South Coast Area water users and state and federal fishery agencies.

Additional Resources

More information on the this Project can be found on the [State Water Board Cachuma webpage](#).

(This Fact Sheet was last updated on Sept. 16, 2019)