

February 15, 2023

## Immediate Action Needed to Keep Water in Clear Lake Creeks

The Clear Lake hitch, a large minnow found only in Clear Lake and its tributary creeks, could soon go extinct. You are receiving this letter because you own or manage property in the Clear Lake area and the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board or Board) needs your help to keep water flowing in Clear Lake creeks for the hitch this spring.

### The Problem

Historically, Clear Lake hitch likely numbered in the millions, but the population has been declining for many years. In 2014, California designated the hitch as a threatened species. While the hitch's decline is linked to several factors—including habitat loss, passage barriers, drought conditions, and invasive species—the most immediate threat to their survival is little to no water flowing in Clear Lake creeks this spring for hitch spawning and rearing.

### Groundwater–Surface Water Connection

It's possible that groundwater pumping is impacting the amount of water flowing in Clear Lake creeks. Groundwater pumping in a watershed can reduce the amount of surface water flowing through creeks, particularly when multiple users are pumping at the same time. The effects of groundwater pumping on creek flows can be instantaneous or can occur more slowly over days, months, or years.

### How You Can Help

The State Water Board is deeply committed to helping Clear Lake communities and tribes protect the hitch. In 2023, we are focusing our efforts on Adobe, Kelsey, Manning, Cole, and Middle creeks. We are asking people in the watersheds that feed these creeks to take voluntary actions to keep water flowing from February through May 2023. Without enough water flowing during this time, the hitch cannot spawn and may go extinct. A map of the creeks and their watersheds is included with this letter.

Voluntary actions you can take to keep water flowing include the following:

- Reduce surface water diversions and groundwater pumping, especially from wells that are close to creeks.
- Coordinate the timing of diversions and pumping with neighbors, so that everyone does not divert or pump at the same time, to reduce impacts on given days or times.
- Use non-water methods for frost protection (such as wind machines or heaters).
- Fill storage reservoirs and water tanks as early in the year as possible before hitch are in the creeks.
- Operate reservoirs and ponds in ways that keep water in the creeks or maximize flows.

E. JOAQUIN ESQUIVEL, CHAIR | EILEEN SOBECK, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Other voluntary actions such as pump-back projects, streambed maintenance, or habitat restoration may require permits and coordination with state and local agencies.

Please let us know what voluntary actions you will take to help the hitch by emailing [ClearLakeHitch@waterboards.ca.gov](mailto:ClearLakeHitch@waterboards.ca.gov).

### **Other Ways to Help**

In addition to keeping water in the creeks now, the State Water Board is looking at long-term solutions to protect the hitch. To do that, we're working with state and federal agencies, local and tribal governments, and agricultural and environmental groups to better understand the situation and collect data that will help us identify problems and explore solutions.

Data: We are asking Clear Lake water users to share data with us. Specifically, we are interested in the following information:

- Groundwater well locations
- Depths of groundwater well screens
- Timing, duration, and volume of groundwater pumping throughout the year (electrical records or approximate electrical costs associated with groundwater pumping can help identify timing and duration of pumping.)

If you'd like to share your data, please email [ClearLakeHitch@waterboards.ca.gov](mailto:ClearLakeHitch@waterboards.ca.gov).

Enforcement: The State Water Board is dedicated to ensuring water use in the area is legal. We are looking at all water rights in the Clear Lake area and assessing compliance with measurement and reporting requirements and permit terms. We will also be investigating complaints of illegal diversions including illegal cannabis. If you believe there is an illegal diversion occurring in the area, please report it through the [CalEPA online Environmental Complaint System](#) and we will investigate.

Cooperative Management Approaches: Cooperative management approaches in the Russian River watershed could be a model for the Clear Lake area. Groundwater pumping for frost protection was impacting surface water supplies in the Russian River—causing fish to become stranded and die. In response, the State Water Board established frost protection regulations in 2015. Local water users in that watershed developed a frost protection program to comply with the regulation, understand their water use, identify non-water methods for frost protection, and develop ways to collaboratively manage water that protects fisheries without negatively impacting their crops. A similar voluntary cooperative approach could help keep water in Clear Lake creeks to protect the hitch.

### **Connect with Us**

The State Water Board will hold an Information Item on the Clear Lake Hitch at its March 7, 2023, public meeting. For meeting details and to stay up to date on our hitch efforts, visit our [Clear Lake hitch webpage](#). If you want to receive email updates, please sign up for our email subscription list at the bottom of the [webpage](#).

We are actively meeting with groups in the Clear Lake area about this topic and are interested in joining other meetings. Please let us know if you'd like us to join a meeting

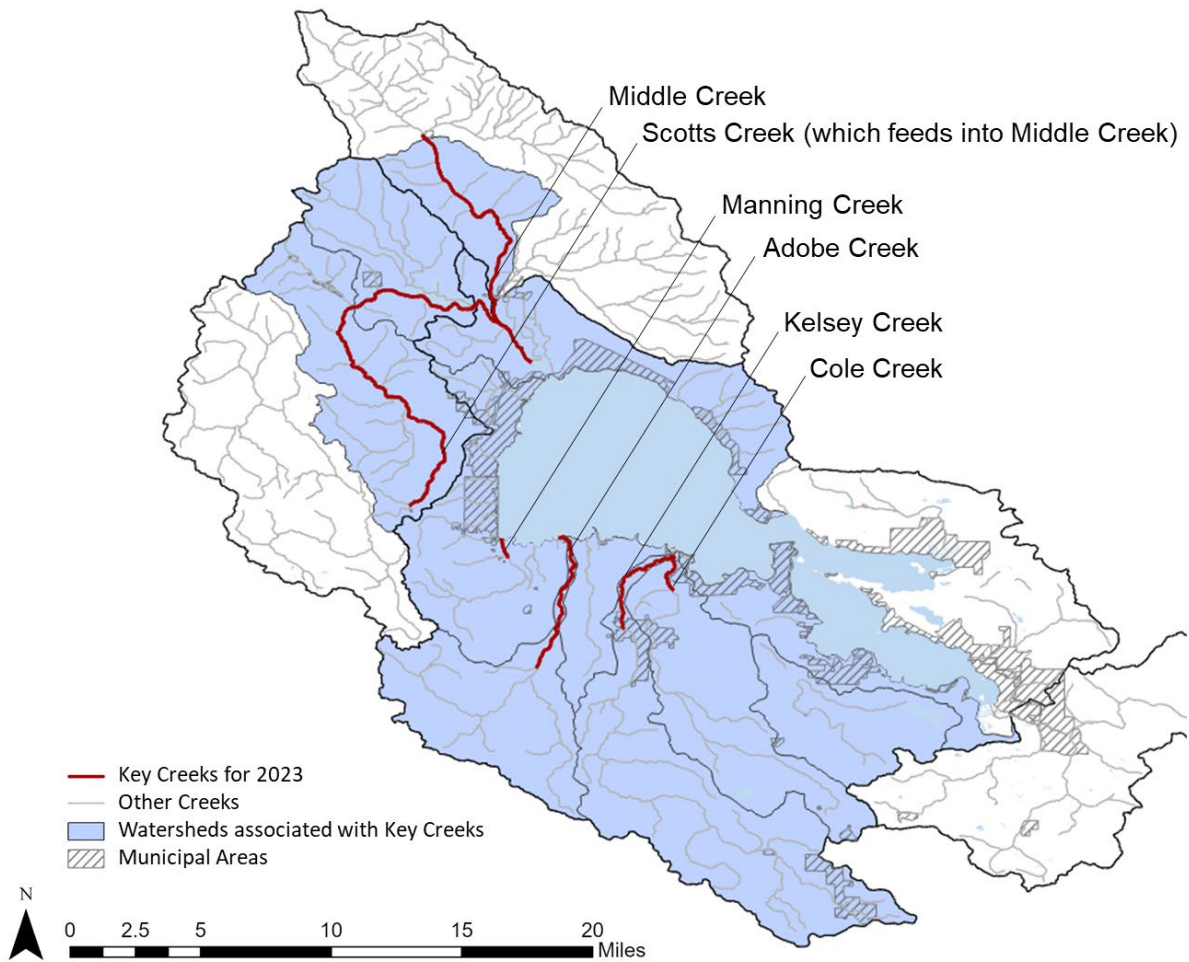
or attend a field visit. Lastly, earlier this year we held two public listening sessions. Recordings of those sessions are available on our [Clear Lake hitch webpage](#).

If you have questions, please email [ClearLakeHitch@waterboards.ca.gov](mailto:ClearLakeHitch@waterboards.ca.gov).

Sincerely,

Erik Ekdahl  
Deputy Director  
Division of Water Rights

### State Water Board Clear Lake Creeks of Concern



### About the California Water Boards

The California State Water Resources Control Board is responsible for administering water rights, regulating drinking water systems, providing grants and loans, and working with the state's nine Regional Water Quality Control Boards to protect the water quality of California's lakes, streams, estuaries, and coastline. For more information about the California Water Boards, please visit our website at [waterboards.ca.gov](http://waterboards.ca.gov).