

See pg 2+3 on  
"Mitigation & Enhancement"



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January 25, 1995 F/SW02:MFG/IVL

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(Jim McN)

Post-it Fax Note	7671	Date	1/27/95	# of pages	4
To	ANNBALL	From	BOB MAY		
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Mr. Roger K. Patterson  
Regional Director  
Mid-Pacific Region  
Bureau of Reclamation  
U.S. Department of Interior  
2800 Cottage Way  
Sacramento, California 95825-1898

Dear Mr. Patterson:

I am pleased to respond to your agency's request for comments concerning the Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (EIS/EIR) for the Cachuma Project Contract Renewal, Santa Barbara County, California (dated November 14, 1994). The document is detailed and well organized. The rationale for most of my comments serve to highlight my concern for the well-being of steelhead trout. Steelhead trout are depleted throughout most of their range in southern California and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is currently reviewing their status to determine whether they should be listed as endangered or threatened species under the U.S. Endangered Species Act (ESA).

General Comments

In spite of its shortcomings, of all of the alternatives presented in the EIS/EIR, it appears that Alternative 3A2 would be the most beneficial to steelhead habitat on the Santa Ynez River (excluding Alternative 2, non-contract renewal). Alternative 3A4 would also benefit steelhead, compared to Alternative 1 (status quo). Nevertheless, none of the twelve options under Alternative 3 provide for adequate spawning migration passage during the steelhead upstream spawning migration between December and March. Therefore, an alternative should be presented that provides for the optimum well-being of steelhead trout.

The Fish Resources Technical Report (see Table 3.1-1) states that water releases from Lake Cachuma of more than 25 cfs are necessary for adequate upstream steelhead passage. However, none of the Alternative 3 options provide for this level of water release during this period. For example, under Alternative 3A2, water releases between December through February 14 would be no greater than 5 cfs. Since the quality of spawning passage flows,



EXHIBIT DOI-14

spawning habitat, and fry habitat are thought to be more important to steelhead on the mainstem of the Santa Ynez River than the quality of juvenile habitat (juveniles likely migrate to tributaries for rearing), water release schedules should be focused on enhancing these steelhead life history stages.

NMFS is reviewing the status of steelhead trout populations throughout their range in California, Oregon, Washington and Idaho to determine whether these populations are an endangered or threatened "species" under the ESA. If steelhead trout on the Santa Ynez River are proposed for listing, the Bureau of Reclamation (BR) will be required to consult with NMFS to identify and resolve potential conflicts with the Cachuma Project. Furthermore, if steelhead on the Santa Ynez River are listed under the ESA, the BR will be required under section 7 of the ESA to insure that the operation of the Cachuma Project will not jeopardize the continued existence of steelhead trout or result in the destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat. Therefore, any preferred contract renewal alternative should retain the flexibility to allow the BR to fulfill its potential obligations under the ESA and address unforeseen environmental issues that may arise. As one possibility, a contract for a shorter term than the proposed 40 years would provide a more flexible mechanism for revisiting contract conditions to ensure that flow releases would not jeopardize the continued existence of steelhead trout.

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#### Specific Comments

Page 4-3 - Recent concern for earthquake safety at Bradbury Dam has required some modification of flows. Alternatives should address this issue, particularly with respect to the possibility that dam storage may be reduced for an indefinite period or time if appropriate repairs are not feasible.

Pages 6.4-1 to 6.4-28 - Remarks regarding mitigation generally state that no mitigation is required since no new impacts are created. This belies the fact that there have been significant impacts over 40 years of project operation and impacts that will continue to exist as long as there is a dam, particularly to anadromous fish. Therefore, there should be a strategy of project mitigation or enhancement that will not only address new impacts but address existing impacts caused by the project. It may be in the best interest of the project to be proactive at enhancing steelhead populations in the river system, so as to buffer stringent requirements that may be established if the steelhead becomes a listed species.

Mitigation or enhancement measures should be considered, but need not be limited directly to the project, and might include actions to eliminate other anadromous fish impacting agents, including the following:

- 1) minimize or eliminate gravel mining,
- 2) enhance steelhead access and use in tributaries as well as the main stem,
- 3) develop flow regimes that give highest consideration to optimizing the most critical life stages of steelhead populations in the river system,
- 4) implement habitat modifications on and off the mainstem of the river that will help optimize steelhead populations,
- 5) implementing mandatory water conservation plans for all users that utilize state-of-the-art technologies and include provisions for upgrading, as appropriate when new technologies become available, and
- 6) implement aggressive ground water management plans to protect ground water resources that may be adversely impacted by water shortages created by the new Cachuma Project operating plan (appropriate agencies should do this independently of this project when necessary).

Page 6.61 - Agricultural economic impacts: There are three questions that should be addressed in the draft EIS/EIR:

- (1) Are economic losses predicted for business and agriculture based on the assumption that they will not be able to reclaim increased costs with higher prices?
- (2) How many farms and what percent would go out of business under each alternative?
- (3) How many acres and what percent would be unavailable for agriculture under each alternative?

I appreciate the opportunity to comment on this project. If you have questions concerning this response, please contact Mr. Marty Golden at (310) 980-4004 or Ms. Irma Lagomarsino at (310) 980-4016.

Sincerely,



Hilda Diaz-Soltero  
Regional Director

cc: C. Dahlstrom, Cachuma Project Authority