

DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES

P.O. BOX 942836
SACRAMENTO, CA 94236-0001
(916) 653-5791



January 11, 2023

Senator Melissa Hurtado
Assemblymember Jasmeet Bains
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Senator Hurtado and Assemblymember Bains,

I am responding on behalf of the Governor to your January 10 letter expressing concern about State Water Project (SWP) operations. I share your sense of urgency about capturing high flows now to replenish reservoirs and aquifers and hopefully hasten the end of drought impacts statewide. As always, we are operating the SWP to balance the needs of California communities, farms, and fish and wildlife, while complying with federal and state permits.

In fact, the SWP has increased the movement of water into storage at San Luis Reservoir since a series of storms began December 27. Export of water from the south Delta is continuing at a rate that is significantly higher than it was before these storms.

Before those storms, SWP pumping in the Delta had been approximately 300 cubic feet per second (cfs). Starting in late December, that pumping has increased to an average of 3,000 cfs and the Department of Water Resources projects that allowable SWP pumping will progressively increase to over 6,000 cfs over the next two weeks. Since December 1, over 150,000 acre-feet of water has been added to the SWP share of the San Luis Reservoir. We expect this volume to increase over the next five days by an additional 50,000 acre-feet to 60,000 acre-feet. As you know, San Luis Reservoir is jointly operated with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and holds water pumped by both the SWP and the federal Central Valley Project (CVP). As of January 11, San Luis storage is at nearly 816,000 acre-feet, holding over 300,000 acre-feet more than it did a month earlier. That additional storage is enough water to supply approximately 873,000 households with water for a year.

The “dialing back” you quoted in your letter was my reference to existing law that requires turbid water generated by high flows in the central Delta to first move through the system. This so-called “first flush” pumping protocol is required by federal and state permits that regulate SWP and CVP operations and ensures imperiled fish species attracted to turbid waters are not unnecessarily drawn toward the SWP and CVP pumps. We are not authorized to end this first flush protocol until January 16. After that, SWP pumping will be adjusted based on

San Joaquin River flows within the federal biological opinion and state incidental take permit rules designed to protect endangered aquatic species.

Current infrastructure to move water through the Delta for use across California is outdated, vulnerable to climate change and earthquakes, and limits the export of water during these long, sustained winter storm events. Our department is advancing the updated Delta Conveyance Project in part to improve our ability to store high winter flows for drier times. The proposed intakes for the Delta Conveyance Project would be in the north Delta and would not have the potential to affect fish in the same way as current diversions in the south Delta.

The Delta Conveyance project and priorities set forth in the Newsom Administration's Water Supply Strategy ensure we are working to capture and store water during big storm events.

Sincerely,

Karla A. Nemeth

Director Karla A. Nemeth
California Department of Water Resources