



Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations, et al. v. Ross, et al.

2020 | Cited 0 times | E.D. California | May 12, 2020

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA THE CALIFORNIA NATURAL RESOURCES AGENCY, et al., Plaintiffs, v. WILBUR ROSS, et al., Defendants.

1:20-CV-00426-DAD-EPG ORDER GRANTING MOTION FOR PRELIMINARY INJUNCTION (Doc. No. 54)

PACIFIC COAST FEDERATION OF et al., Plaintiffs, v. WILBUR ROSS, et al., Defendants.

1:20-CV-00431-DAD-EPG

ORDER GRANTING IN PART AND DENYING IN PART AS MOOT MOTION FOR PRELIMINARY INJUNCTION AND HOLDING CERTAIN ISSUES IN ABEYANCE (Doc. No. 81.)

INTRODUCTION This order addresses motions for preliminary injunction filed in two largely overlapping cases: California Natural Resources Agency v. Ross, No. 1:20-CV-00426-DAD-EPG (CNRA), and , 1:20-CV-00431-DAD-EPG

(PCFFA). In CNRA, plaintiffs are the People of the State of California, Californ PCFFA, plaintiffs are a coalition of six environmental organizations led by

PCFFA (collectively, PCFFA).

Both sets of plaintiffs bring claims against the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), and various official representatives of those agencies. (CNRA, Doc. No. 51, First Amended Complaint (FAC); PCFFA, Doc. No. 52, FAC. CNRA challenge the adoption by NMFS and FWS, respectively, of a pair of (BiOps) issued in 2019 pursuant to the Endangered Species Act (ESA), 16 U.S.C § 1531 et seq.,

regarding the impact on various ESA-listed species of implementing updated Plan for the long-term operation of the Central Valley Project (CVP) and the State Water Project . More specifically, in its first and second claims for relief California alleges that NMFS and FWS violated the Administrative Procedure Act (APA), 5 U.S.C. § 706, in various ways by concluding that the Water Projects would not jeopardize the continued existence of the ESA-listed species addressed in each biological opinion. California also brings claims against Reclamation under the ESA (third claim for relief) for



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unlawfully relying on the 2019 BiOps in formally adopting and implementing the Proposed Action, and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 42 U.S.C. § 4321 et seq., (fourth claim for relief). Finally, California alleges in its fifth claim for relief that Reclamation has violated the APA by failing to comply with the California Endangered Species Act (CESA), which compliance California alleges is required by various provisions of federal law. , although its complaint does not include a CESA-based claim. (PCFFA, Doc. No. 52, First Amended Complaint.) On March 25, 2020, these cases were transferred to this district from the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California in light of related cases already pending before the undersigned. (CNRA, Doc. No. 26; PCFFA, Doc. No. 112.) ////

Now pending before the court are inter-related and overlapping motions for preliminary injunction in both cases. (PCFFA, Doc. No. 81 (filed March 5, 2019); CNRA, Doc. No. 54 (filed April 21, 2019).) The briefs, declarations, and attachments submitted in connection with these pending motions make up a lengthy and complex record. PCFFA and California have urged the court to act expeditiously before certain events take place in May. Accordingly, the court accelerated the briefing schedule where necessary and set a hearing on the pending motions for May 7, 2020. All parties made appearances through counsel at an all-day videoconference hearing on that date, as stated on the record. (See PCFFA, Doc. No. 167; CNRA, Doc. No. 99). Thereafter, the parties submitted a small number of additional documents referenced at the hearing, which the court has also reviewed.

PCFFA requests that the court issue a broad preliminary injunction order temporarily setting aside the 2019 BiOps and prohibiting Federal Defendants from implementing or taking any actions in reliance on those BiOps, including prohibiting Reclamation from implementing the Proposed Action in reliance on those BiOps. (PCFFA, Doc. No. 81-1 at 2 3.) PCFFA also has requested that the court order Federal Defendants to instead adhere to the previous operational regime for the Water Projects authorized pursuant to previously-controlling BiOps issued in 2008 and 2009 by FWS and NMFS, respectively, until this court can resolve the merits of claims asserted in the pending action. (Id. at 2.) was accompanied by extensive and wide-ranging briefing challenging numerous aspects of the Proposed Action and the 2019 BiOps, focusing on issues related to operations at the Water Project pumping facilities in the southern portion of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta (Delta) as well as instream temperature management planning and protocols for Shasta Dam on the Upper Sacramento River and New Melones Reservoir on the Stanislaus River. (See generally PCFFA, Doc. No. 86.) The record presented by PCFFA, Federal Defendants, and Defendant Intervenors in PCFFA in connection with the pending motions also contains extensive information addressing how the planned operations may, or may not, harm ESA-listed winter-run Chinook salmon (winter-run), spring-run Chinook salmon (spring-run), California Central Valley steelhead (CCV steelhead), and Delta smelt.

motion for preliminary injunction is more narrowly focused on the period from now until May 31, 2020. It requests that the current operating regime (i.e., the Proposed Action as approved by the 2019 BiOps) hrough to the extent that operation is inconsistent with the requirement in Reasonable and



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Prudent Alternative Action IV.2.1, was BiOp (2009 NMFS BiOp). (CNRA, Doc. No. 60 at 7 8.) (emphasis added). The emphasized text requests imposition of one aspect of the 2009 NMFS BiOp that was not carried forward into the 2019 NMFS BiOp: a restriction on the amount of exports permitted at the CVP and SWP pumping plants in the South Delta that operates by imposing an inflow to export ratio, with the inflow numerator based upon flow in the San Joaquin River measured at Vernalis. motion focuses on harm during this narrower period to ESA-listed Delta smelt and CCV steelhead, as well as to CESA-listed Longfin smelt. (See generally CNRA, Doc. No. 54.)

These requests for preliminary injunctive relief are not mutually exclusive, since the broader injunction sought by motion encompasses the relief requested by California.

Having con for the reasons explained below, the court will: the Proposed export operations in the South Delta and reinstate RPA Action IV.2.1 from the 2009 NMFS BiOp from the date of this order up to and through May 31, 2020, on the specific ground that operations carried out pursuant to the Proposed Action will irreparably harm threatened CCV steelhead; (b) deny cts as having been rendered moot by this order; (c) deny ; and (d) hold all other aspects of in abeyance with the understanding that the court intends to issue a separate order addressing those remaining requests for injunctive relief in the near future.

STANDARD OF DECISION The proper legal standard for preliminary injunctive relief requires a party to demonstrate merits, that he is likely to suffer irreparable harm in the absence of preliminary relief, that the balance of equities tips in his favor, and that an injunction

Stormans, Inc. v. Selecky, 586 F.3d 1109, 1127 (9th Cir. 2009) (quoting Winter v. Nat. Res. Def. Council, Inc., 555 U.S. 7, 20 (2008)); see also Ctr. for Food Safety v. Vilsack Winter irreparable harm is likely, not just possible, in order t Am. , 559 F.3d 1046, 1052 (9th Cir. 2009). The Ninth

serious questions going to the merits were raised and the balance of hardships tips sharply in the All. for Wild Rockies v. Cottrell, 632 F.3d 1127, 1134 35 (9th Cir. 2011) (internal quotation and citation omitted). 1

For the purposes of injunctive relief, refers to questions which cannot be resolved one way or the other at the hearing on the injunction and as to which the court perceives a need to preserve the status quo lest one side prevent resolution of the questions or execution of any judgment by altering the status quo. Serious questions are substantial, difficult and doubtful, as to make them a fair ground for litigation and thus for more deliberative investigation. Republic of the Philippines v. Marcos, 862 F.2d 1355, 1362 (9th Cir. 1988) (quotations marks and citation omitted).

The party seeking an injunction bears the burden of proving these elements. Klein v. City of San Clemente, 584 F.3d 1196, 1201 (9th Cir. 2009); see also Caribbean Marine Servs. Co. v. Baldrige merely allege imminent harm sufficient to establish standing; a plaintiff must demonstrate immediate



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threatened injury as a prerequisite to preliminary injunctive relief.

Winter, 555 U.S. at 22.

An injunction must be narrowly tailored to avoid the irreparable identified. Nat'l Wildlife 1

-element Winter All. for the Wild Rockies hardships that tips sharply towards the plaintiff can support issuance of a preliminary injunction, so long as the plaintiff also shows that there is a likelihood of irreparable injury and that the injunction is in the public Id. at 1135.

sufficient causal connection between the alleged irreparable harm and the activity to be enjoined, but a plaintiff need not further show that the action sought to be enjoined is the exclusive cause of Id. (internal quotation and citation omitted). discretion for a court to issue an injunction that does not completely prevent the irreparable harm Id.

APPLICABLE STATUTORY STANDARDS A. APA

capricious, an abuse of discretion, or otherwise not in ac The Lands Council

v. McNair, 537 F.3d 981, 987 (9th Cir. 2008) (en banc) (citing 5 U.S.C. § 706(2)(A)), overruled on other grounds by Winter, 555 U.S. 7; see also Earth Island Inst. v. Carlton, 626 F.3d 462, 468

McNair, 537 F.3d

Id. (citing Marsh v. Or. Nat. Res. Council, 490 U.S. 360, 378 (1989)).

capricio League of Wilderness Defs./Blue Mountains Biodiversity Project v. Connaughton, 752 F.3d 755,

759 60 (9th Cir. 2014) (internal citations omitted).

This requires the court to ensure that the agency has not, for instance, entirely failed to consider an important aspect of the problem, offered an explanation for its decision that runs counter to the evidence before the agency, or [an explanation that] is so implausible that it could not be ascribed to a difference in view or the product of agency McNair, 537 F.3d at 987 (citing Motor Vehicle Mfrs. Assn., Inc. v. State Farm Mut. Auto. Ins. Co., 463 U.S. 29, 43 (1983)). B. ESA

with identifying threatened and endangered species and designating critical habitats for those

Nat. Res. Def. Council v. Jewell, 749 F.3d 776, 779 (9th Cir. 2014) (NRDC v. Jewell) (citing 16 U.S.C. § 1533). FWS and NMFS administer the ESA on behalf of the Departments of the Interior and



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Commerce, respectively. See 50 C.F.R. §§ 17.11, 222.101(a), 223.102, 402.01(b). Most pertinent to the present motion is Section 7 of the ESA (Section 7). 16 U.S.C. § 1536. Section 7(a)(2) imposes a procedural duty on the federal agencies to consult with the FWS or NMFS, depending on the protected species, 2 funded, or carried out by such agency . . . is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of critical habitats of listed species. 16 U.S.C. § 1536(a)(

mean all activities carried out by federal agencies, including, among other things, the granting of licenses and permits. See 50 C.F.R. § listed species, then the agency must consult with the Secretary of the Interior, either formally or *Am. Rivers v. NMFS*, 126 F.3d 1118, 1122 (9th Cir. 1997).

Formal consultation results in the issuance of a BiOp by the relevant wildlife agency (FWS or NMFS). See 16 U.S.C. § 1536(b). If the BiOp concludes that the proposed action would jeopardize the species or destroy or adversely modify critical habitat, see *id.* § 1536(a)(2),

Id. § 1536(b)(3)(A). If a BiOp concludes that the proposed action (or the action implemented in conjunction with actions described in the RPA) will cause incidental taking of protected species, but that despite this taking, the action will not jeopardize the species or threaten critical habitat, the wildlife agency // 2 Generally, FWS has jurisdiction over species of fish that either (1) spend the major portion of their life in fresh water, or (2) spend part of their lives in estuarine waters, if the remaining time is spent in fresh water. See ., 620 F. Supp. 2d 1111, 1120 n.1 (E.D. Cal. 2008), as corrected (Oct. 31, 2008). NMFS is granted jurisdiction over fish species that (1) spend the major portion of their life in ocean water, or (2) spend part of their lives in estuarine waters, if the remaining portion is spent in ocean water. *Id.* FWS exercises jurisdiction over the delta smelt; NMFS exercises jurisdiction over the winter-run and spring-run and the CCV steelhead.

shall provide the Federal agency and the applicant concerned, if any with a written statement that (i) specifies the impact of such incidental taking on the species, (ii) specifies those reasonable and prudent measures that the Secretary considers necessary or appropriate to minimize such impact, (iii) . . . , and (iv) sets forth the terms and conditions (including, but not limited to, reporting requirements) that must be complied with by the Federal agency or applicant (if any), or both, to implement the measures specified under clauses (ii) and (iii). *Id.* § 1536(b)(4). This required (ITS), which, if followed, exempts the action agency from the prohibition on takings found in

Section 9 of the ESA. *Id.* § 1536(o); , 175 F.3d 1156, 1159 (9th Cir. 1999).

FACTUAL BACKGROUND A. The Central Valley Project and the State Water Project

The CVP and the SWP *San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Auth. v. Jewell*, 747 F.3d 581, 592 (9th Cir. 2014) (*San Luis v.*

Jewell Id. As one part of CVP operations, Reclamation releases water stored in CVP reservoirs in



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northern California, which then flows down the Sacramento River to the Delta. See id. at 594. Pumping plants in the southern region of the Delta (South Delta) then divert the water to various users south of the Delta. See id. at 594 95.

[Water] Projects provide substantial benefits to people and to state

San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Auth. v. Locke, 776 F.3d 971, 986 (9th Cir. 2014) (San Luis v. Locke). This is because

flow in the OMR. Id

Id. Listed species particularly juveniles are caught in the negative current and drawn towards the pumping facilities. Id

where they are counted, measured, loaded into trucks, driven north, and dumped back into the Id flow have a lower likelihood of surviving outmigration than their counterparts that avoid 3

by Water Project operations. Id. The Delta smelt (*Hypomesus transpacificus* -to-three inch species of fish San Luis v. Jewell, 757 F.3d at 595. In 1993, FWS concluded the delta percent over the previous twenty years and listed it as a Determination of Threatened Status for the Delta Smelt, 58 Fed. Reg. 12,854, 12,855 luding those resulting from operations of the CVP and SWP, are a significant

Id. at 12,859. Longfin smelt (*Spirinchus thaleichthys*) their spawning season from January through March down to the coastal waters outside the Golden

CNRA, Doc. No. 55, Declaration of Bruce Herbold (Herbold Decl.) at ¶ 31.) Longfin dant than Delta Id.) Nonetheless, Longfin s drought of the mid- Id. at ¶ 32.) Longfin smelt are listed under CESA but not the ESA. (See id. at ¶ 19.) /////

3 As the court in San Luis v. Locke roughly described diverted water rather than the natural course of a river, stream, pond, or lake. The danger with entrainment is that fish can become stranded in irrigation canals or killed when they are trapped

The winter-run and spring-run (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), and CCV steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), are anadromous fish, meaning that they live most of their lives in salt San Luis v. Locke, 776 F.3d 986 87.

After they grow from fry (baby fish) to smolts (juvenile fish) in fresh water, anadromous salmon outmigrate through rivers and deltas into the oceans and seas where they will spend most of their adult lives. When it is time to reproduce, these salmon migrate back through the deltas to the rivers and lakes in which they were born to lay eggs. During this migration, salmon must pass impediments



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in inland rivers such as locks, dams, channels, and pumps. *Id.* at 987. Notable for purposes of the pending motions, NMFS divides CCV steelhead into three for management purposes: the basalt and porous lava diversity group, the northern Sierra Nevada diversity group, and the southern Sierra Nevada diversity group. (See PCFFA, Doc. No. 85-2 (2019 NMFS BiOp) at 769.)

Because the remainder of the discussion in this Order focuses on impacts to CCV steelhead, the court will briefly review only the development of regulatory regimes designed to protect the listed salmonid species in the region impacted by the Water Projects, and will largely skip over the roughly parallel developments related to the smelt species. B. 2004 Operations and Criteria Plan & Resulting BiOps On June 30, 2004, Reclamation prepared an operational plan, dubbed the Operations Criteria and Plan (OCAP), to provide, among other things, a basis for renewing various long-term water contracts. *NRDC v. Jewell*, 749 F.3d at 780. Pursuant to Section 7, Reclamation initiated consultation with NMFS over the impact of the 2004 OCAP on listed species under See 2019 NMFS BiOp at 10 (describing consultation history.) That BiOp became the subject of numerous lawsuits, ultimately resulting in a finding that the October 2004 no jeopardy BiOp was unlawful. *Pac. Coast Fed'n of Fishermen's Ass'n v. Gutierrez*, 606 F. Supp. 2d 1122 (E.D. Cal. 2008) (PCFFA v. Gutierrez).

Starting in 2006, NMFS and Reclamation engaged in renewed consultation. See *San Luis v. Locke*, 776 F.3d at 988. On June 4, 2009, NMFS issued, and Reclamation accepted, a BiOp

-term operations of the CVP and SWP are likely to jeopardize the -run, spring-run, and CCV steelhead. (See PCFFA, Doc. No. 85-18 (2009 NMFS BiOp) at 575.) As required by law, the BiOp included an RPA designed to allow the projects to continue operating without causing jeopardy to the species or adverse modification to its critical habitat. (*Id.* at 575-671.)

(*Id.* at 578.) The 2009 NMFS BiOp provided a succinct overview of the RPA, pertinent parts of which provide helpful background here:

There are several ways in which water operations adversely affect listed species that are addressed in this RPA. We summarize the most significant here:

*** The effects analysis [in the 2009 NMFS BiOp] shows that juvenile steelhead migrating out from the San Joaquin River Basin have a particularly high rate of loss due to both project and non-project related stressors. The RPA mandates additional measures to improve survival of San Joaquin steelhead smolts, including both increased San Joaquin River flows and export curtailments. Given the uncertainty of the relationship between flow and exports, the RPA also prescribes a significant new study of acoustic tagged fish in the San Joaquin Basin to evaluate the effectiveness of the RPA and refine it over the lifetime of the project.

*** On the Stanislaus River, project operations have led to significant degradation of floodplain and rearing habitat for steelhead. Low flows also distort cues associated with out-migration. The RPA



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proposes a year-round flow regime necessary to minimize project effects to each life-stage of steelhead, including new spring flows that will support rearing habitat formation and inundation, and will create pulses that cue out-migration.

(Id. at 576 78.)

Both the 2009 NMFS BiOp and a parallel 2008 FWS BiOp addressing impacts to Delta smelt were subject to legal challenges but were ultimately upheld by the Ninth Circuit. *San Luis v. Jewell*, 747 F.3d 581; *San Luis v. Locke*, 776 F.3d 971. /////

C. Reconsultation Request & Issuance of New BiOps & NEPA Document

In 2016, after years of drought and concerns over extremely low population numbers of winter-run, FWS and NMFS reinitiated consultation under the ESA. (PCFFA, FAC at ¶ 6; see also PCFFA, Doc. No. 86-4 (8/2/16 reinitiation request letter from NMFS to Reclamation).) In January 2019, Reclamation issued a biological assessment (BA) 4

for the Proposed Action. (See 2019 NMFS BiOp at 12.) Pursuant to the ESA, Reclamation again consulted with FWS and NMFS. (See id.)

In July 2019, NMFS prepared a draft BiOp in which the agency concluded that, absent constraints, the as set forth in the January 2019 BA was likely to jeopardize the continued existence of and destroy or adversely modify the critical habitat of the listed salmonid species. (PCFFA, Doc. No. 85-13 (NMFS July 2019 Draft BiOp).) Thereafter, Reclamation and DWR incorporated changes to the proposed plan, including additional commitments to address impacts to listed species. (See 2019 NMFS BiOp at 12 14.)

A few months later, however, on October 21, 2019, Reclamation issued a revised, Final BA describing a revised operating plan for the Water Projects (PCFFA, Doc. No. 85-12 (BA)), which constituted the final Proposed Action. On the same day, NMFS issued a BiOp that revised proposed plan was not likely to jeopardize the existence of winter-run and spring-run salmon and Central Valley steelhead beyond that permitted under its 2009 opinion. (See generally 2019 NMFS BiOp.) Following a very similar consultation pathway the continued existence of the Delta smelt or modify its habitat. (PCFFA, Doc. No. 85-1 (2019

4 See 16 U.S.C. § 1536(c)(1). If endangered species

Id requirement only if it determin *Karuk Tribe of Cal. v. U.S. Forest Serv.*, 681 F.3d 1006, 1027 (9th Cir. 2012) (en banc) (internal citation omitted). If the BA determines that a threatened or endangered sp See 16 U.S.C. § 1536(a)(2); 50 C.F.R. 402.14.



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FWS BiOp).) Having found no jeopardy, the BiOps imposed no additional protective conditions 5 On February 18, 2020, Reclamation issued its Record of Decision on the Coordinated Long-Term Operation of the Central Valley Project and State Water Project (ROD), thereby approving the Proposed Action. (PCFFA, Doc. No. 85-14 (ROD)).

These lawsuits followed close on the heels of the issuance of the challenged BiOps and ROD.

DISCUSSION As the court explained at the May 7, 2020 hearing, it has divided its evaluation of the pending motions according to the broad geographic regions addressed therein. Roughly speaking, those regions are: (1) the upper Sacramento River below Shasta Dam; (2) the Stanislaus River below New Melones Dam; and (3) the Delta. The court will soon address the issues raised in of this order will address the pending motions with respect to the second and third geographic

areas in turn. A. Request for Injunctive Relief Regarding Stanislaus River Operations

The briefing submitted raises merits challenges to, and discusses the potential harms flowing from, the alleged weakening of requirements for minimum Stanislaus River flows below New Melones Dam. In particular, PCFFA alleges and has attempted to prove that CCV steelhead spawning and rearing in the Stanislaus will be harmed by reduced releases from New Melones in the coming weeks and months between now and this court ruling on the merits of the action. (See PCFFA, Doc. No. 86 at 15.)

At the hearing on the pending motions, however, Kristen White, the Operations Manager of Office, forthrightly testified that it is anticipated operations at New Melones will largely be controlled by factors other than the 2019 NMFS BiOp,

5 Overlapping with this process, Reclamation conducted a NEPA review. Because that process is not relevant to the resolution of the pending motions, the court does not discuss it in detail here.

resulting in flows in May and at least part of June that will be at least as protective for CCV steelhead as conditions would have been under the 2009 NMFS BiOp. (See May 7, 2020 Rough Hearing Transcript (Tr.) 125 32.) The court interprets testimony and related statements by counsel to be a commitment to meet or exceed instream flows that would have been provided under the 2009 NMFS BiOp through May and at least a portion of June. Given that commitment, the court will also accept counsel for PCFFA assurance provided at the hearing (id. at 127:10-14) that this commitment resolves Stanislaus operations, at least through that time period.

The court further finds that the evidence presented by PCFFA as to irreparable harm on the Stanislaus is largely confined to the March through June timeframe. (See PCFFA, Doc. No. 82, Declaration of Dr. Jonathan Rosenfeld (Rosenfeld Decl.), at ¶ 128.) The parties have not highlighted any evidence in the record currently before the court that suggests irreparable harm to CCV



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steelhead in the Stanislaus river is likely to occur for the remaining months of this year. for a preliminary injunction will be denied as moot as to their assertions regarding instream flow requirements below New Melones Dam. This ruling, however, will not foreclose any future motion for injunctive relief premised upon a renewed showing of likely harm. B. Request for Injunctive Relief Regarding Delta Operations

1. Likelihood of Success Re: ESA Claims Against NMFS The motions of both sets of plaintiffs focus at least in part on impacts to salmonids in the South Delta. Among many other complaints, plaintiffs assert that operations under the Proposed Action in April and May of 2020 are not sufficiently protective of the listed salmonids (winter- run and spring-run Chinook, and/or CCV steelhead) juveniles of each of which pass through the Delta during the spring. Plaintiffs emphasize the 2019 NMFS BiOp omission of a particular protective measure required by the 2009 NMFS BiOp. As mentioned, the 2009 NMFS BiOp imposed limits on exports by way of a requirement that San Joaquin River inflow be balanced against exports according to pre-determined ratios (I:E Ratio) set according to the category of water year (designated as critically dry, dry, above normal, or wet). (2009 NMFS BiOp at 644 Case 1:20-cv-00431-JLT-EPG Document 174 Filed 05/12/20 Page 14 of 36 45.) For a critically dry year, the 2009 NMFS BiOp imposed a ratio of San Joaquin River inflow to combined exports of 1:1, while in a dry year, the ratio was 2:1, with increasingly large (3:1, 4:1) ratios being imposed as conditions become wetter. (Id.) The Ninth Circuit previously reviewed one specific aspect of this I:E Ratio the imposition of a 4:1 ratio in wet years and

discretion to implement. *San Luis v. Locke*, 776 F.3d at 1004.

The 2019 NMFS BiOp eliminated this requirement, leaving no I:E Ratio in place for April and May, instead imposing alternative protective measures built into the Proposed Action, centered in the near term around certain . Of particular importance here is a provision that limits losses 6

at the export facilities in any single year to 90% of the greatest annual loss recorded since the implementation of the 2009 BiOp (2010 to 2018). (2019 NMFS BiOp at 528, 534 35.) The loss limit for CCV steelhead, calculated based on historically observed salvage at the export facilities is subdivided into two time periods in order to help [River]-o resulting in two separate single-year loss thresholds: 1,414 between December 1 and March 31,

and 1,552 between April 1 and June 15. (2019 NMFS BiOp at 534, 547). If in any year, 50% and 75% of the annual loss thresholds are exceeded, CVP and SWP exports will be managed in such a way so as to limit OMR reverse flow to -3,500 cubic feet per second (cfs) and -2,500 cfs, respectively. (Id.; see also PCFFA, Doc. No. 130-1, Declaration of Chandra Chilmakuri ///// ///// ///// ///// /////

6 based on expansion of observed salvaged fish and using [] current loss mul BiOp at 507.) The details of the underlying calculations do not appear to be placed at issue by the pending motions.



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(Chilmakuri Decl.), ¶ 32.) 7

In other words, if the loss thresholds are met (i.e., triggered), Reclamation and DWR will collectively manage export pumping to ensure that reverse flows in OMR are less negative (i.e., more positive) than -2,500 or -3,500 respectively. In short, if those management limits are triggered, the hydrodynamic situation in the region of the Delta influenced by the export pumps would tend to be more natural than it otherwise would be without those management limits. Plaintiffs vigorously argue that, for a variety of reasons, the replacement of the I:E Ratio with the performance measures, including the single-year loss thresholds described above, renders the 2019 NMFS BiOp irrational/arbitrary under the APA. In early April 2020, before briefing on the pending preliminary injunction motions was complete, PCFFA brought this particular issue before the court as part of an application for a temporary restraining order (TRO Motion) based assertions, operations under the Proposed Action in early April would likely permit export pumping significantly above and beyond that which would have been permissible had the I:E Ratio been in place. (See generally PCFFA, Doc. No. 131.) At issue in the TRO Motion was a very short window of time on April 10, 2020, of a so-protective action that closely resembles the I:E Ratio. (Tr. 59:8 2.) After a hearing, the court

denied PCFFA TRO Motion, finding that the showing of irreparable harm was insufficient on the then-presented record, particularly in light of the brief period of time at issue. (PCFFA, Doc. No. 142 at 11 (TRO Order).) /////

7 The 2019 NMFS BiOp also imposes a baseline limit, layered on top of the -3,500 and -2,500 cfs limits triggered by the loss thresholds, that prohibits OMR reverse flows from being more negative than -5,000 cfs. (2019 NMFS BiOp at 16.) Generally, this -5,000 cfs limit operates from January through June. (Id.) But, that -5,000 cfs limit is subject to a potentially large exception in the form of a provision in the Proposed Action that would allow reverse flows to exceed -5,000 cfs during certain kinds of storm events. (Id. at 16, 60.) Exactly when that provision could be invoked is unclear on the present record before the court, although the negative OMR limits associated with the single year loss thresholds, if triggered, would preclude invocation of the storm event provision. (Id. at 479.) The parties discussed the storm event provision in their papers and at oral argument on, but the court finds it unnecessary to address this matter in detail as its reasoning in resolving the pending motions is grounded elsewhere.

Nothing has been presented to the court to cause it to depart from its conclusion expressed in the TRO Order that plaintiffs have raised serious questions on the merits with respect to the I:E Ratio issue. The court still believes that the record before it supports, at least preliminarily, a Ratio going forward amounts to a change of position that triggers certain obligations under the APA. Specifically, where an agency departs from its previous findings, th

ate a Defs. of Wildlife v. Zinke, 856 F.3d 1248, 1262 (9th Cir. 2017) (quoting , 626 F.3d 1040, 1051 (9th Cir. 2010)). Here, for the reasons explained below, the court again concludes plaintiffs have raised



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serious questions about whether NMFS has articulated a satisfactory explanation for its dramatically changed approach. 8

Draft BiOp concluded that the approach advocated in an early version of the Proposed Action than that contained in the 2009 NMFS d substantial export reductions in the April and May periods to protect San (Doc. No. 140-3 at 405.) The final 2019 NMFS BiOp reiterates in various places that the originally-framed Proposed Action would be detrimental to fish populations. For example, in discussing the results of at least one flow modeling exercise, NMFS acknowledged that the proposed regulatory regime NMFS BiOp at 483.) After undergoing revisions, the final version of the Proposed Action

8 At oral argument on the TRO Motion, counsel for Defendant Intervenor San Luis & Delta Mendota Water Authority and Westlands Water District suggested, at least indirectly, that this might not be the appropriate standard to be applied because, here, NMFS has not technically changed its position. Rather, they suggested, only the Water Project proposed by Reclamation has changed. As the court noted in its TRO Order, this is a distinction without a difference. measure it previously thought was crucial enough to impose upon operations is no longer

at 6 n. 3.)

included the performance measures and loss targets described above. Although NMFS leans heavily on the performance objectives even in light of these recognized negative impacts, it does not appear to be prepared to conclude those measures are entirely sufficient to make up for the lost ground it acknowledges. Particularly with respect to impacts to San Joaquin-origin CCV steelhead, NMFS has stated:

reduce steelhead survival to Chipps Island 9

for the Southern Sierra Nevada Diversity Group, further exacerbating the already diminished status of this diversity group. During the consultation process, NMFS and Reclamation worked to develop actions that might partially offset the effects to San Joaquin basin steelhead related to not having [an] I:E ratio or Head of Old River Barrier in plan. Delta Performance Objectives including a Cumulative Loss Threshold and a Single-year Loss Threshold with two time periods (December through March and April through June) that are intended to provide protections for both San Joaquin basin and Sacramento basin CCV steelhead. Reclamation also proposed the CCV steelhead Lifecycle Monitoring Program, in part to help improve CCV steelhead science [that] can be used to protect San Joaquin Basin steelhead and inform actions such as water operations. (2019 NMFS BiOp at 777) (emphasis added). Federal Defendants have attention to a lengthy section of the 2019 NMFS BiOp that attempts to integrate and synthesize the impacts of all of the various changes incorporated into the Proposed Action relative to the 2009 NMFS BiOp. (Id. at 747 96.) Among other things, the 2019 NMFS BiOp imposes various conservation measures and limits on negative flows in the Old and



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Middle River channels of the San Joaquin River. The court has thoroughly reviewed that entire section of the 2019 NMFS BiOp with a particular focus on the discussion of CCV steelhead (*id.* at 769 86), keeping in mind the deference the court must . The key lessons from this review are as follows:

First, as mentioned, the basalt and porous lava diversity group, the northern Sierra Nevada diversity group, and the

southern Sierra Nevada diversity group. (*Id.* at 769.) Watersheds utilized by the four 9 Chipps Island is a location at the western edge of the Delta; if a juvenile makes it to Chipps Island (See 2019 NMFS BiOp at 149.)

diversity groups were prioritized into three categories (Core 1, Core 2 and Core 3). (*Id.* at 777.)

Core 1 watersheds possess the known ability or potential to support a viable population. Core 2 populations meet, or have the potential to meet, the biological recovery standard for moderate risk of extinction. Although Core 2 watersheds are lower priority, they remain important because they provide increased life history diversity [listed populations] and are likely to buffer against local catastrophic occurrences that could affect other nearby populations. (*Id.*)

ce of CCV

to some extent,

adult numbers are still low, a large percentage of the historical spawning and rearing habitat is lost or degraded, and smolt production is dominated by hatchery fish. Many planned restoration and reintroduction efforts have yet to be implemented or completed. Most natural origin CCV steelhead populations are not monitored and may lack the resiliency to persist for protracted periods if subjected to additional stressors, particularly widespread stressors such as climate change and drought.

(*Id.* at 770.) Among the numerous threats to steelhead is entrainment (see note 3 above), which initial modeling expected to be more pronounced in dry years and greatest in April and May:

Delta export actions at both State and Federal Facilities can create near- and far-field effects on emigrating fish in the Delta including decreased transit times, increase risk of predation and direct salvage and loss (entrainment) at the facilities Reclamation proposes to increase south Delta water exports relative to a current operations scenario and results from the [initial modeling] indicate that losses of CCV steelhead would increase under the proposed action in the winter and spring months. The effects of these changes on the relative flow conditions in the Delta are more



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pronounced in drier year types. Loss increases are expected to be greatest during April and May, coinciding with the peak of juvenile outmigration of CCV steelhead from the San Joaquin Basin.

(Id. at 773) (emphasis added) (citations omitted).

do not include loss due to [fish

screening equipment] cleaning, predation observed to occur on the upstream side of the trash racks, or far-field predation associated with altered hydrodynamics, and therefore

underestimate mortality associated with south Delta pumping and fish salvage (Id. at 774) (emphasis added). In response to initial loss modeling, Reclamation revised its proposed action to include the

cumulative loss thresholds and single year loss thresholds (cumulatively referenced as Id.) In light of these revisions, NMFS concluded: While loss is expected to occur under the final proposed action, performance objective thresholds are expected to limit loss to levels similar [to] what has been observed over the past 10 years. (Id.) A critical question arises in the context of this conclusion: How can a be justified in relation to a species that even the BiOp recognizes has been in decline? Put into legal evidence of record suggesting that impacts? For example, the 2019 NMFS BiOp i natural-origin CCV

steelhead have continued to decrease in abundance and in the proportion of natural-origin to hatchery- -term trend remains Id. at 108.) In short, according to the 2019 NMFS BiOp itself, the listed

Id.) The BiOp provides some clues as to NMFS

o NMFS expects that the operation of the loss thresholds themselves, if they trigger

10

(Id.) 10 are expected to provide additional protections for CCV steelhead migrating through the Delta. (Id. at 774.) The court does not believe it is necessary or expedient to delve into all of the details of those issues here, but notes that both sets of plaintiffs have raised significant questions about the efficacy of the referenced Delta smelt protections. For example, many of those purportedly protective actions are triggered by (or have exceptions that may be triggered by) the application of a life cycle model that had not been finalized by the time the 2019 FWS BiOp issued. (See PCFFA Doc. No. 85-1 (2019 FWS BiOp) at 42 43, 151). Moreover, the 2019 FWS BiOp relies in a number of ways on real-time monitoring even though by all accounts Delta smelt are so rare that monitoring is largely unreliable (id Case 1:20-cv-00431-JLT-EPG Document 174 Filed 05/12/20 Page 20 of 36

o Conservation actions are planned as part of the Proposed Action, including actions



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specifically targeting CCV steelhead habitat. The proposed conservation measures are expected to help CCV steelhead withstand adverse effects of the proposed action and improve the science that can be used to protect CCV steelhead from adverse effects associated with CVP and SWP water operations. NMFS expects that these measures maintain the abundance, survival and productivity metrics of populations throughout the action area. (Id. at 776.) The BiOp acknowledges that the

entrainment in CVP/SWP pumping projects, and is expected to impede migration for adult and juvenile CCV steelhead from the Sacramento and San Joaquin basins migrating through the Delta. (Id. at 779). Nonetheless, the BiOp appears to conclude these impacts are acceptable, in part because the CCV steelhead populations impacted by export pumping those in the Stanislaus and Tuolumne Rivers 11

are NMFS appears to engage in the following rough math regarding the overall impacts to these types of populations:

In total, three of six Core 1 populations and three of 15 Core 2 populations are expected to be affected by the CVP. NMFS expects that despite ongoing adverse effects of the Central Valley Project on individuals and their respective populations, and the continued and significant adverse effects that are part of the environmental baseline (such as the loss of historical habitat related to the physical presence quantify and monitor the amount or number of individuals that are expected to be incidentally. Even in light of the applicable deferential APA standard, the court is hesitant to give significant weight to a reference to this provision, which is not formally incorporated into the 2019 NMFS BiOp. 11 Three populations make up the southern Sierra Nevada diversity group: the Calaveras River population (Core 1), the Stanislaus River population (Core 2), and the Tuolumne River population (Core 2). (See id. at 780.) At one point in the 2019 NMFS BiOp, NMFS indicates only one of the three populations that make up this diversity group the Stanislaus River population would be impacted by export pumping. (Id. at 779 80.) This seems illogical at first blush because, while the Calaveras River (and therefore CCV steelhead emerging therefrom) merges with the San Joaquin River downstream of the export pumping facilities, the Tuolumne River merges with the San Joaquin upstream of the Stanislaus River. (Compare 2019 NMFS BiOp at 3 (Figure 1 (showing CVP dams and facilities), with id. at 109 (Figure 24 (showing CCV steelhead critical habitat and associated waterways); see also PCFFA, Doc. No. 82 (Declaration of Jonathan Rosenfeld) at 41 n. 13 (noting the same)).

of Keswick and Shasta Dams), the proposed action includes conservation measures and other actions intended to maintain the abundance, productivity, spatial structure, and/or diversity of the DPS in those populations potentially impacted by the proposed action. (Id. at 781.) First, as previously mentioned, see note 6 above, it is not clear that this tallying is correct or meaningful. Second, absent more detailed discussion/justification, the logic underpinning this reasoning seems to be at odds with other statements made elsewhere in the 2019 NMFS BiOp, including the general acknowledgement that provide increased life history diversity to the ESU/DPS and are likely to buffer



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against

BiOp at 777.)

Based upon its review of the 2019 NMFS BiOp, the court concludes that the evidence before it continues to support the basic findings of the TRO Order regarding likelihood of success on the merits. The record is too mixed for the court to conclude at this time that plaintiffs are clearly likely to be able to show that NMFS has violated the APA. However, plaintiffs have certainly raised serious questions as to whether NMFS has justified its changed position as to elimination of the San Joaquin River I:E Ratio generally. At a bare minimum, plaintiffs have raised at least the following serious question: Even after Reclamation incorporated the new performance measures/loss limits into its Proposed Action, NMFS was only able to Given that it appears to be undisputed that CCV steelhead are declining, the court has serious concerns as to whether this to evaluate whether the Proposed Action would jeopardize the species or destroy or adversely modify critical habitat. 16 U.S.C. § 1536(a)(2). substantial, difficult and doubtful, as to make them a fair ground for litigation and thus for more deliberative investigation and thereby constitute questi on the merits established by plaintiffs. Republic of the Philippines, 862 F.2d at 1362. ///// /////

2. Likelihood of Success Re: ESA Claims Against Reclamation Because the requested injunctive relief would apply directly to Reclamation, the court finds it necessar

a. Threshold Jurisdictional Challenge a civil action governmental instrumentality or agency (to the extent permitted by the Eleventh Amendment to the Constitution), who is alleged to be in violation of any provision of this chapter or regulation . § 1540(g). contains a requirement that notice be provided to the alleged violator (e.g., Reclamation), as well as to the Secretary of the Interior and/or Commerce, sixty days prior to the filing of any citizen suit. Id. § 1540(g)(2)(A)(i).

Here, PCFFA provided a notice of intent to sue on November 23, 2019, to all the appropriate persons/agencies. (PCFFA, Doc. No. 52-1.) Although the notice was sent after the 2019 BiOps were adopted by NMFS and FWS, on October 21, 2019, the notice was sent before Reclamation formally decided to adopt the terms and conditions contained within those BiOps, a determination Reclamation made on February 18, 2020. (PCFFA, Doc. No. 85-14.) Federal Defendants argue here that the court therefore lacks jurisdiction over third claim for too early. (PCFFA, Doc. No. 119 at 30.)

ts Federal Defendants may be advocating for an overly strict interpretation of this provision, see All. for the Wild Rockies v. U.S. of Agric., 772 F.3d 592, 602 03 (9th Cir. 2014) (permitting non-ESA claims to commence before notice and allowing amendment of a complaint after the notice period expired), the court finds it unnecessary to resolve this issue. This is because Federal Defendants do not argue that the court lacks jurisdiction over claim against Reclamation, likely because California alleges it gave notice to Reclamation on February 20, 2020. (CNRA, FAC at ¶ 6.) ///// /////



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b. Merits of ESA Claim Against the Reclamation Plaintiffs claim that Reclamation, as the action agency, unjustifiably relied on and accepted the 2019 NMFS BiOp. The relevant inquiry is not whether the BiOp itself is flawed, but rather whether the action agency's reliance on the BiOp was arbitrary and capricious. *City of Tacoma, Wash. v. FERC*, 460 F.3d 53, 75-76 (D.C. Cir. 2006); see also *Defs. of Wildlife v. Zinke*, 856 F.3d at

Tacoma, 460 F.3d at 75 (citing *Aluminum Co. of Am. v. Administrator Bonneville Power Admin.*, 175 F.3d 1156, 1160 (9th Cir. 1999)) (internal quotations omitted).

[I]f the law required the action agency to undertake an independent analysis, then the expertise of the consultant agency would be seriously undermined. Yet the action agency must not blindly adopt the conclusions of the consultant agency, citing that agency's expertise. Rather, the ultimate responsibility for compliance with the ESA falls on the action agency. *Id.* at 76 (internal citations omitted).

In some circumstances, if a BiOp is based on information, the action agency would only be found to have acted unlawfully in relying on that opinion if the challenging party can point to i.e., information the consultant agency did not take into account which challenges the opinion. *Id.*; see also *PCFFA v. Gutierrez*, 606 F. Supp. 2d at

through the BiOp or some other document. *Center for Biological Diversity v. Rumsfeld Defs. of Wildlife v. EPA*, 420 F.3d 946, 959 (9th Cir. 2005), reversed on other grounds by *Natl. Ass'n of Home Builders v. Defs. of Wildlife*, 551 U.S. 644 (2007).

Here, PCFFA points out that it provided Reclamation with a detailed notice letter prior to OD (representing Proposed Action in light of the reasoning in and conclusions of the 2019 BiOps), identifying numerous issues with the 2019 NMFS BiOp. Yet, Reclamation took no action to remedy those

flaws. Moreover, given the extensive incorporation into the NMFS BiOp of reasoning and modeling generated by Reclamation, it embraced (if not generated itself) much of the reasoning of the 2019 NMFS BiOp. *Natl. Wildlife Federation v. NMFS*, No. CV 01-640-RE, 2005 WL 1398223, *3 (D. Or. June 10, 2005) (finding the action agency liable where it embraced the same fundamental legal flaws set forth in the applicable environmental document). For these reasons, the court finds that the serious extend to their claims challenging Reclamation acceptance of the 2019 NMFS BiOp and therefore raise serious

3. Irreparable Harm

a. Applicable Standard Environmental injury, by its nature, can seldom be adequately remedied by money damages and is often permanent or at least of long duration, i.e., irreparable. *Amoco Prod. Co. v.*



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Vill. of Gambell, 480 U.S. 531, 545 (1987). In the context of the ESA, in the plainest of words, making it abundantly clear that the balance has been struck in favor of

affording endangered species the highest Tenn. Valley Auth. v. Hill, 437 U.S. 153, 194 (1978). To show irreparable harm in the context of the ESA, plaintiffs do not need to

Serv., 886 F.3d 803, 818 19 (9th Cir. 2018) (NWF III) (permitting without specifying that some

Serv., 524 F.3d 917, 930 (9th Cir. 2008) (NWF II) (finding an age deepens [pre- Thus, for example,

requirement. Wishtoyo Found. v. United Water Conservation Dist., No. CV 16-3869-DOC

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2020); see also PCFFA v. Gutierrez, 606 F. Supp. 2d at 1207 10, 1249. 12 The court also notes that, while its analysis of likelihood of success in the context of an injunctive relief request is governed by the deferential APAs arbitrary and capricious standard, see Lands Council, 537 F.3d at 987; Ranchers Cattlemen Action Legal Fund United Stockgrowers of Am. v. , 415 F.3d 1078, 1093 (9th Cir. 2005), as amended (Aug. 17, 2005), Ninth Circuit authority suggests that the court does not necessarily owe deference to federal agencies positions concerning irreparable harm, balance of hardships, or public interest. The decision in Sierra Forest Legacy v. Sherman, 646 F.3d 1161 (9th Cir. 2011) is instructive. There, in the context of a motion for a post-judgment permanent injunction, the Ninth Circuit held that a n by deferring to agency views concerning the equitable Sherman, 646 F.3d 1186. The Ninth Circuit reasoned that analysis by the district court

Id. In doing so the court observed that if government experts ction, substantive relief Id.

b. Record Evidence of Harm to CCV Steelhead he first question the court must address is a practical one: whether operational actions in the Delta in coming weeks and months will be any different as a result of the shift from the old regime (under the 2009 NMFS BiOp and related 2008 FWS BiOp) to the new one (under the Proposed Action and the 2019 BiOps). As was the case with the Stanislaus River, the primary focus of the harms evidence

12 PCFFA points out, correctly, that in the course of permitting an injunction based upon some the Ninth Circuit has indicated that NWF III, 886 F.3d at 819. To the extent PCFFA is attempting to argue that harm to individual members of the species at issue in this case will suffice to justify irreparable harm, the court finds it unnecessary to go that far since the record presently before the court demonstrates a magnitude of harm that is cognizable via the more traditional pathway.

presented in connection with the pending motions regarding South Delta operations for the remainder of the year concerns the remainder of the month of May. 13



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(See CNRA, Doc. No. 60 (California requesting relief only through May 31); Doc. No. 55, Declaration of Bruce Herbold fisheries expert discussing predominantly concerns to larval Delta smelt and Longfin smelt up to and through May, noting that most of the Delta smelt will arrive in the more favorable Low Salinity Zone (not in the South Delta) in the last three weeks of -June generally) At the May 7, 2020 hearing, White testified that as we move into June, operations are likely to be governed by state law requirement that would dictate (Tr. 50.) Moreover, all parties before the court agree that because we are in a period of relatively dry hydrology (see Tr. 25:7 9, 60:18 19, 61:20) habitat actions set forth in the respective FWS BiOps aimed at improving Delta smelt habitat conditions - are not in play this year, since they would only take place in a relatively wet year (Tr. 66). Accordingly, the court finds there has been a lack of proof by plaintiffs as to the need for any injunctive relief with respect to Delta export operations past the end of May.

Turning to the May 11 to May 31 timeframe, the operational picture is less clear. During her testimony at the recent hearing, Ms. White could not definitively indicate what particular regulatory control would govern Delta export operations. (Id. at 50.) Evidence has been presented indicating that, at least generally in a dry year like this one, OMR flows will be more negative in the coming weeks under the 2019 BiOps than would have been the case under the previous regulatory regime. (See 2019 FWS BiOp at 152 (plot of modeled mean OMR flows showing that flows under the Proposed Action will be more negative than under the previous regulatory regime).) No defendant seriously disputes this conclusion. In fact, Defendant Intervenor San Luis & Delta Mendota Water Authority and its member agency Westlands Water

13 Obviously, given the date of this Order, the focus of th analysis will be on the likelihood of harm from May 11, 2020 onward.

have presented counter-harms evidence indicating that through May 31 water supply to areas south of the Delta of approximately 52,000 acre- CNRA, Doc. No.

74-4, Declaration of Thomas Boardman (Boardman Decl.) at ¶ 3.) Such evidence serves to confirm that the general trends warned of in the BiOp itself (more export pumping under the new regulatory regime) likely would occur in the absence of the granting of an injunction.

The next question that must be answered in assessing irreparable harm is whether a not-insignificant percentage of CCV steelhead will be in a location where they may likely be negatively impacted by Delta export operations. Dr. Rosenfeld testified at the May 7 hearing that the 2019 NMFS BiOp identifies the largest migration of steelhead from the San Joaquin side of the system to occur in April and May. (Tr. 173:3 5.) Other documents before the court, such as the most rece indicate 35-55% of natural origin steelhead were then PCFFA, Doc. No. 168-2 (5/5/20 SMT Notes) at 111.) On the other hand, that as of April CNRA, Doc. No. 74-1, Declaration of Charles Hanson (Hanson Decl.) at ¶ 4.) Dr. Hanson also stated that 3% of juvenile steelhead have migrated downstream past Chipps Island, and an estimated 81.9% of steelhead salvage has [already] Id. at ¶ 13.)



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This general statistic does not, however, take into consideration the distinct life history of the southern Sierra Nevada diversity group, which the BiOp acknowledges migrates through the Delta on a relatively later schedule. Joaquin River basin, CCV steelhead smolts are expected to appear in the southern Bay-Delta

regional waterways as early as January, based on observations in tributary monitoring studies on the Stanislaus River, but in very low numbers. The peak emigration in the lower San Joaquin River, as determined by the Mossdale trawls near the Head of Old River, occurs from April to

The primary question therefore becomes the extent to which operations over the coming weeks will harm CCV steelhead in a material way, remembering that the proof of harm need not

to show irreparable harm in the context of the ESA. NWF III, 886 F.3d at 818 19. Here, i of CCV Steelhead continues to occur at (or as a result of) the export pumping facilities. The court observes that its denial of TRO Motion appears to have resulted in increased export pumping which was associated with increased CCV steelhead salvage, as depicted in the chart provided by Dr. Hanson in his declaration in the CNRA case. (Hanson Decl. at 6.) As exports declined due to the

salvage. Dr. Hanson opines that this was due to seasonal trends (id. at ¶ 13), but fisheries expert, Dr. Herbold, suggests ignores the distinct nature of the San Joaquin-origin steelhead population, of which approximately 34% will be out-migrating in the last 21 days of May. (See Herbold Decl. ¶ 62.)

Dr. Herbold also opines that -March through the date of his declaration on April 21, 2020, [CCV] steel Id. at ¶ 46.) Finally, he declares that many of those salvaged in the days just prior to his declaration fish . . . essential to the survivability and recovery of [s]teelhead in the isolated populations in the Id.)

As mentioned, the 2019 NMFS BiOp set two separate loss thresholds for CCV steelhead: 1,414 between December 1 and March 31, and 1,552 between April 1 and June 15. (2019 NMFS BiOp at 534, 547). 50% of that threshold. For April 1 through June 1, therefore, 50% is 776 fish. (CNRA, Doc. No. 73-1, Declaration of Joshua Israel (Israel Decl.) at ¶ 15.) Israel, a Supervisory National Resource Specialist with Reclamation, reports that natural

April 1 through April 28 was calculated to be 244.8 fish, which was, as of that date, 31.5% of the way toward the 776 fish 50% loss threshold reductions in export pumping. As of May 5, 2020, updated records put the total as of that date at

253 (or 33% of the 50% loss threshold). (5/5/20 SMT Notes at 114.)

In light of the above, defendants emphasize that actual loss numbers have not yet approached the 50% loss threshold, suggesting that this fact is dispositive of the s



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irreparable harm analysis. (See generally Israel Decl.; Chilmakuri Decl. ¶ 39.) The court does not agree. For one thing, the evidence See id. at 114 (5/5/20 SMT Notes plotting out whether observed loss and potential future loss (based on historic salvage data) could cause the 50% loss threshold

loss o but see Israel Decl. at ¶ 15 (stating his opinion that approximately 132 more natural steelhead would be lost between April 29 and June 15 this year based on historical timing, which would accumulate to 49% of the 50% loss threshold).)

In addition, the court is persuaded by many of the arguments advanced by plaintiffs that the loss threshold approach is not sufficiently protective. For example, as mentioned, NMFS contends in the 2019 NMFS BiOp that, despite the fact that initial modeling indicated that CCV steelhead loss would increase markedly in May under the Proposed Action, this potential harm would be mediated by the addition of the loss threshold triggers. Dr. Herbold opines, however, that due to declining numbers of CCV steelhead, particularly those in the Stanislaus River that are part of the southern s Id. at ¶ 63.)

The BiOp itself indicates that the loss threshold approach is anticipated to provide roughly the same amount of protection as was created by the measures enacted under the 2009 NMFS BiOp. As recognized in the court merits analysis set forth above, despite Reclamation inclusion in its revised Proposed Action of performance objective thresholds that include the loss limits, NMFS was only able to conclude performance objective thresholds are expected to limit loss to levels similar [to] what has been observed over (2019 NMFS BiOp at 774.) The court has questioned above amount of loss could be justified (i.e., would not contribute to jeopardy) with respect to a species

that NMFS concedes has already been in decline. Here in the harm context, a related question cannot be escaped: How can these loss limits effectively function to avoid irreparable harm to a declining steelhead population if those loss limits expected to limit loss to levels similar what has been observed over the past 10 years? As the 2019 NMFS BiOp itself

indicates, this steelhead population is in serious peril:

An important aspect of the analysis for CCV steelhead concerns the status of the Southern Sierra Nevada Diversity Group, which is critical to preserving spatial structure of the CCV steelhead DPS. This diversity group, consisting of extant populations in the Calaveras, Stanislaus, Tuolumne, Merced and upper mainstem San Joaquin rivers, is very unstable due to the poor status of each population. This status is due to both project-related and non-project related stressors. (2019 NMFS BiOp at 674.)

Unlike the then-seemingly-nominal loss levels presented in the context of the TRO Motion, the present cumulative losses are considerably higher and continue to occur. Given the extremely precarious situation faced by the San Joaquin-origin CCV steelhead, the court concludes plaintiffs have established irreparable harm in the absence of the granting of injunctive relief.



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Plaintiffs have also established that the requested injunction is likely to alleviate at least some of this harm. Through Dr. Rosenfeld, plaintiffs have presented evidence that recent research demonstrates the imposition of an I:E Ratio improves survival of salmonids migrating through the Delta. (Rosenfeld Decl. at ¶ 120 21 (discussing 2018 research and concluding that it [CCV] steelhead juveniles emigrating from the San Joaquin Valley was better predicted by a measure that considers Project exports in the context of San Joaquin River flows into the Delta (San Joaquin I:E) than it was by either export rates or river inflows alone this finding strongly supports the use of the San Joaquin I:E ratio to protect migrating juvenile Central Valley Steelhead).) According to testimony provided by Ms. White, operational uncertainties make it impossible to determine at this time whether a re-instituted I:E Ratio will even control operations. (See Tr. 49.) Nonetheless, the record certainly suggest imposition of the I:E Ratio will reduce export pumping to the detriment of water users. (See Boardman Decl. at ¶ 3.) This evidence supports a finding of irreparable harm.

The court further finds that imposing the I:E Ratio is a narrowly tailored form of injunctive relief. It will last through the end of this month of May; was specifically designed to assist out-migrating steelhead from the San Joaquin river; and may not even result in as much

detriment to water users as feared by Defendant Intervenors, depending on the extent to which other operational constraints control export pumping this month.

4. Balance of the Harms.

a. General Legal Standard

., 422 F.3d 782, 793 94 (9th Cir. 2005) (NWF I) preliminary injunction standard the equities and public interest factors

Cottonwood Env'tl. Law Ctr. v. U.S. Forest Serv., 789 F.3d 1075, 1091 (9th Cir. 2015).

In light of these authorities, the court finds that the irreparable harm identified above tips the balance strongly in favor of the imposition of an injunction. Although plaintiffs have not demonstrated those harms - the harms are real, ongoing and are likely to have enough of a population level impact to warrant an injunction. As discussed above, there are serious issues with the application of the loss threshold approach adopted in the 2019 BiOp. Defendants near exclusive reliance on that loss threshold approach in the near term (since other actions are being planned for the future), undermines the effective use of that approach as an adequate protective measure.

b. Public Interest Underpinning the WIIN Act San Luis argues that the 2016 Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act (WIIN Act), Title III, Subtitle J, § 4002(a), Pub. L. No. 114-322, 130 Stat. 1628, 1855 (2016), should be taken into consideration by the court in conducting the public interest balance. (CNRA, Doc. No. 74 at 6.) In assessing the impact of the WIIN Act in this regard,



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one must be mindful of both the 2008 FWS BiOp, which imposed an outer limit on reverse OMR flows of -5,000 with more stringent limitations coming into play depending on conditions, fish monitoring, and the time of year (see 2008 FWS BiOp at 280 82), and the 2009 FWS BiOp which, as discussed

above, imposed various provisions that constrained export pumping, including the I:E Ratio. Some viewed the approaches taken in these BiOps as more cautionary (and therefore more restrictive to water supply) than justified by the then-available science, but ultimately the Ninth Circuit found the restrictions to be lawful and supported by the record. See *San Luis v. Jewell*, 747 F.3d at 607 15; *San Luis v. Locke*, 776 F.3d at 1004.

In the WIIN Act, Congress instructed Reclamation to maximize export pumping, but to do so within the sideboards of the applicable biological opinions and state law requirements. Thus, WIIN Act § 4002(a) requires Reclamation to

manage reverse flow in Old and Middle Rivers at the most negative reverse flow rate allowed under the applicable biological opinion to maximize water supplies for the Central Valley Project and the State Water Project, unless that management of reverse flow in Old and Middle Rivers to maximize water supplies would cause additional adverse effects on the listed fish species beyond the range of effects anticipated to occur to the listed fish species for the duration of the applicable biological opinion, or would be inconsistent with applicable State law requirements, including water quality, salinity control, and compliance with State Water Resources Control Board Order D 1641 or a successor order. (*Id.*) (emphasis added); see also WIIN Act § of Commerce shall provide the maximum quantity of water supplies practicable to Central Valley

Project [contractors], by approving, in accordance with applicable Federal and State laws (including regulations), operations or temporary projects to provide additional water supplies as quickly as possible, based on available information.). Reclamation is required under the WIIN Act to document in writing the reasons why it constrains reverse flows to a level not as negative as the most negative flow permitted. *Id.* at § 4002(b). 14

The WIIN Act directs Reclamation to - *id.* § -time *Id.* at § 4001(b)(1)(B). However, nothing in the WIIN Act modifies (or even bends) any of Federal 14 The court notes that the WIIN Act does not appear to contemplate the scenario presented by reverse flows when that provision is found to be applicable. Nonetheless, the overall tenor of the WIIN Act endorses the maximizing of exports while remaining in compliance with the mandates of the ESA and other applicable laws.

obligations under the ESA.

While the WIIN Act perhaps expresses a Congressional preference for a balanced approach to managing OMR flows, its plain language does not modify the scope or application of the ESA in any



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way. Here, plaintiffs have raised serious questions as to the validity of the applicable NMFS BiOp. The WIIN Act does nothing to alter the well-established jurisprudence regarding the balance of the harms in an ESA case such as this one.

Having concluded that plaintiffs have established that they are entitled to the granting of a preliminary injunction, the court now turns to the specific terms and requirements of that relief. C. Bond Requirement

Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 65(c) provides

Security. The court may issue a preliminary injunction or a temporary restraining order only if the movant gives security in an amount that the court considers proper to pay the costs and damages sustained by any party found to have been wrongfully enjoined or restrained. The United States, its officers, and its agencies are not required to give security.

Johnson v. Couturier, 572 F.3d 1067, 1086 (9th Cir. 2009). C

City of South Pasadena v. Slater, 56 F. Supp. 2d 1106, 1148 (C.D. Cal. 1999); see also Save Strawberry Canyon v. DOE, 613 F.Supp.2d 1177, 1190 (N.D. Cal. 2009) (waiving a Rule 65(c) bond in a NEPA case where [p]laintiff is a small nonprofit organization and has indicated that it would have difficulty al precautions to ensure access to the courts must be taken where Congress has provided for private enforcement of a , 766 F.2d 1319, 1325 26 (9th Cir.), amended, 775 F.2d it is to be waived by the court. See Save Strawberry Canyon, 613 F. Supp. 2d at 1191.

Here, however, neither set of plaintiffs have directly addressed the issue of the posting of a bond or security. California does suggest in its proposed order granting relief that the court

should entirely waive the bond requirement here but provides no evidence or authority in support of such a determination. (See CNRA, Doc. No. 60 at 8.) There is authority suggesting that even parties such as the plaintiffs now before this court must make a showing to justify the setting of only a nominal bond amount or no bond at all. See W. Watersheds Project v. Zinke, 336 F. Supp. 3d 1204, 1246 47 (D. Idaho 2018). In the context of prior challenges to the 2009 NMFS BiOp, in the absence of comment or evidence on this issue, the court involve[d] the management of public resources, wholly under the control of the action agency,

Reclamation, and because the injunctive relief is of limited duration, [the water agency plaintiff] was required to post a bond in the amount of \$5,000 to secure the relief provided by law in the event it is determin San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Auth. v. Locke, No. 1:09-CV-01053-OWW-DLB, 2010 WL 500455, at *8 (E.D. Cal. Feb. 5, 2010)

Here, based on the present record and given that the plaintiffs include a coalition of environmental



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organizations of various sizes and the independent sovereign State of California, the court concludes a slightly lesser total bond amount is appropriate. Accordingly, each set of plaintiffs will be required to post a \$1,000 bond.

CONCLUSION For the reasons set forth above the court:

south Delta to the extent that those operations do not comply with RPA Action IV.2.1 from the 2009 NMFS BiOp from the date of this order up to and through May 31, 2020, on the specific ground that such operations will irreparably harm threatened CCV Steelhead;

to renewal; and addressing those remaining matters in a separate order.

PRELIMINARY INJUNCTION ORDER IT IS HEREBY ORDERED that Defendant U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, its officers, agents, servants, employees and attorneys, and those in active concert or participation with Defendant U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, are hereby preliminarily enjoined, from the effective date of this order through and including May 31, 2020, pursuant to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 65, from operating the Central Valley Project in the manner described in the Final Biological Assessment for Reinitiation of Consultation on the Coordinated Long-Term Operation of the Central Valley Project and State Water Project issued by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation on October 17, 2019, and the Final Environmental Impact Statement on the Reinitiation of Consultation on the Coordinated Long-Term Operation of the Central Valley Project and State Water Project, to the extent that operation is inconsistent with the requirement in Reasonable and Prudent Alternative Action IV.2.1, which appears on pages 642 44 of the Biological Opinion and Conference Opinion on the Long-Term Operations of the Central Valley Project and State Water Project issued by the National Marine Fisheries Service on June 4, 2009. The court recognizes that Defendant U.S. Bureau of Reclamation will require time to operationalize this change and it and its agents are therefore excused from compliance for no more than 24 hours from the date of entry of this order, so long as they are taking all reasonable steps during that period of time toward implementation.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that, absent subsequent waiver by the court, on or before Friday, May 15, 2020, plaintiffs in California Natural Resources Agency v. Ross, No. 1:20-CV- 00426-DAD-EPG, must post a \$1,000 bond; likewise, on or before Friday, May 15, 2020, plaintiffs in , 1:20-CV-00431-DAD-EPG must post a \$1,000 bond. Both bonds must be deposited into the court registry. IT IS SO ORDERED. Dated: May 11, 2020 UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE

