

Group criticizes salmon transport plan

Story

Comments

Print Font Size:



Recommend 1

Share



Tweet

G+1

0



Share

0

Posted: Sunday, January 17, 2016 11:16 pm

Andrew Creasey/Appeal-Democrat

A plan to capture and transport salmon into the upper reaches of the Yuba River has come under fire by a local conservation group, which is spearheading a letter-writing campaign to advocate for other solutions to introduce the endangered fish to its native spawning grounds.

The South Yuba River Citizen's League has set a goal of sending 1,000 letters to Gov. Jerry Brown, urging state and federal agencies to investigate more solutions for fish passage over Englebright Dam before resorting to a plan SYRCL called "short-sighted."

"It's premature to settle on a (trap-and-haul) solution when we believe there are so many unanswered questions about the best way to move salmon over the dam," said Caleb Dardick, SYRCL's executive director.

SYRCL has long advocated lowering Englebright Dam and installing a fish ladder so fish can access the upper parts of the Yuba River without being captured and trucked miles upriver.

"We don't believe trap-and-haul to be sustainable — it involves driving fish back and forth forever," Dardick said. "We want to do more than save a few fish. We want to restore the ecological health of the watershed."

Last May, a coalition of agencies announced the framework for a settlement agreement that would reintroduce spring-run Chinook salmon, through a trap-and-haul system, into the Yuba River above New Bullards Bar Reservoir.

The Yuba County Water Agency committed up to \$100 million to the project. The total cost estimate of the project ranges from \$400 million to \$500 million to more than \$800 million.

The primary concern about the trap-and-haul method is that it bypasses fish around a portion of the watershed and subjects both adult and juvenile fish to the stress of capture, handling and transport. This can lead to a variety of negative consequences, including pre-spawn mortality and behavioral changes that can lead to increasing stray rates, said Gary Reedy, SYRCL's senior river scientist.

Under the term sheet released in May, YCWA and the other parties — National Marine Fishery Service, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, American Rivers, Trout Unlimited and California Sportfishing Protection Alliance — agreed that the reintroduction plan would avoid the need to address the issue of fish passage in YCWA's new FERC license.

Englebright — a 280-foot-tall barrier to migrating endangered fish built to hold back 28 million cubic yards of toxic sediment left over from hydraulic mining during the Gold Rush — is the central figure in the debate over bringing endangered fish back into the upper reaches of the Yuba River.

Englebright Dam is a complete barrier to the historic Chinook salmon, steelhead and green sturgeon spawning grounds in the upper Yuba watershed. Conservation groups such as SYRCL and American Rivers have maintained fish passage to and from habitat above Englebright Dam is essential to restoring a healthy population of spring-run Chinook salmon.

Dardick said SYRCL is advocating any money currently available be used to restore habitat and improve the fishery population in the lower Yuba River. In the mean time, an independent scientific panel can investigate still-unanswered questions about the economics and feasibility of fish passage alternatives.

For more information, visit fishdontdrive.org.

YCWA General Manager Curt Aikens did not respond to an email and a phone call requesting comment.

CONTACT reporter Andrew Creasey at 749-4780 and on Twitter [@AD_Creasey](https://twitter.com/AD_Creasey).