

CALFED EWA Background

The San Francisco Bay/Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Estuary (Bay-Delta) is a region of critical importance to California. It is the hub of the State's water supply system, and an area of unsurpassed ecological importance for salmon, migratory waterfowl, and a host of other plants and animals.

Numerous State and Federal agencies with management and regulatory responsibilities for the Bay-Delta undertook an effort beginning in 1995 to develop a long-term plan to restore ecological health and improve water management for beneficial uses of the Bay-Delta system. The CALFED agencies undertook a comprehensive analysis of potential solutions to the ecosystem restoration, water quality, water supply reliability, and levee system integrity problems of the Bay-Delta and in August 2000, issued a Programmatic Record of Decision (ROD) for the CALFED Program, reflecting the final selection of the long-term Plan (Plan) for the Bay-Delta. The Ecosystem Restoration Program Plan (ERPP) is an element of the Plan. Implementation of the Plan is expected to occur over a thirty year period. Stage 1 of implementation covers the first seven years of this 30-year effort and builds the foundation for long-term actions.

One of the commitments of the ERPP, as defined in the ROD, is to improve salmon spawning and juvenile survival in upstream tributaries as defined by the ERPP and Strategic Plan, by purchasing up to 100,000 acre-feet (AF) per year by the end of Stage 1. Similarly, the Plan calls for pursuing a full implementation of ERP upstream flow targets through voluntary purchases of at least 100,000 AF by the end of Stage 1. The Environmental Water Program was developed to meet this commitment.

The goal of the Environmental Water Program is to acquire water in support of the ERPP to:

- enhance instream flows that are biologically and ecologically significant,
- improve the state of scientific knowledge related to the effects of instream flows, and
- gain knowledge regarding the institutional and social constraints facing environmental water acquisitions.

A high level of uncertainty exists regarding how the EWP should be implemented; specifically how much water should be acquired on which streams, what benefits can be expected from enhancing instream flows, and how can those benefits be measured. In addition, a large number of uncertainties related to the institutional aspects of acquiring water have been identified. Therefore, implementation of the Environmental Water Program will be carried out as a series of pilot water acquisitions on high priority (first tier) streams within an adaptive management framework. These acquisitions will be undertaken to achieve four objectives (derived through the steering committee process described in the previous section):

- Acquire water on 1-3 priority streams;
- Design and apply a science-based adaptive approach to all three acquisitions to increase our understanding of how the system works;
- Improve conditions for target fish species or reinvigorate flow-related ecosystem functions; and
- Achieve, where possible, multiple environmental benefits from each acquisition.