

Historic Agreements for New Instream Flows & Habitat Restoration in California's Bay-Delta Watershed

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Environmental improvements are greatly needed for the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers, its major tributaries, and the Bay-Delta, collectively known as the Bay-Delta Watershed, to reverse long-term declines in native fish populations. The State of California's natural resources agencies, local water districts, and several federal natural resources agencies are working to advance a transformational, watershed-wide approach to increase river flows, restore ecosystems and strengthen water supply reliability across California.

The proposed approach -- sometimes referred to as "Voluntary Agreements" because parties came together to propose it, is a comprehensive, multi-year solution that brings together dozens of water agencies with the state and federal governments to pool resources and take concrete actions to provide targeted increases in river flows and expand habitat enhancements in the Bay-Delta Watershed. These environmental improvements are guided by collaborative decision-making, scientific monitoring, and a comprehensive science program. This new approach will also allow water managers to adapt operations based on real-time conditions and enable broad coordination across watersheds to manage flows for maximal benefits. Such adaptive management is critical as climate change increases uncertainty and drives extreme conditions.

Once finalized, the agreements would dedicate a large quantity of new water to the environment, up-to 825 thousand acre-feet (TAF), and restore over 30,000 acres of aquatic habitat for native fish species and other animals. This approach provides a promising pathway to protect and restore our environment, enable California's economy to thrive, and establish a foundation for a more resilient future.

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