



# County of Monterey

**Item No.5**

## Board Report

Board of Supervisors  
Chambers  
168 W. Alisal St., 1st Floor  
Salinas, CA 93901

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**Current Status:** Agenda Ready

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**Matter Type:** WR General Agenda

Consider receiving an update on the status of the Salinas River Habitat Conservation Plan

### RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Monterey County Water Resources Agency Board of Directors:

Receive an update on the status of the Salinas River Habitat Conservation Plan

### SUMMARY/DISCUSSION:

As the result of a formal consultation under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) with the Army Corps of Engineers, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) issued a Biological Opinion (BO) for the Salinas Valley Water Project (SVWP) in 2007. The BO incorporated the 2005 Salinas Valley Water Project Flow Prescription for Steelhead Trout in the Salinas River (Flow Prescription) which provided SVWP operational requirements to reduce potential impacts of project operations on steelhead. On February 20, 2019 NMFS notified the Agency that the 2007 BO and associated incidental take statement was being withdrawn.

In 2018, prior to the withdrawal of the BO, the Agency began the process of developing a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) under Section 10 of the ESA. Funded through a grant from the California Coastal Conservancy, the 2019 Salinas River Long-Term Management Plan was developed to document historical and current conditions in the lower Salinas River watershed, identify long-term management goals, and serve as a foundational document for the HCP.

Beginning in April 2020, the Agency was awarded a series of grants to fund HCP development.

Delays in executing grant funding agreements slowed the progress of HCP development but by April 2022 three grant agreements were in place providing reimbursable grant funding of \$2.75M.

While waiting on the grant agreements, the Agency and consultants ICF and FISHBIO continued to perform technical studies and surveys with limited Agency funds to help define the activities, species, and locations that will be covered by the HCP. Once all three grant agreements were in place Agency staff and consultants drafted a revised work plan and timeline that incorporated the specific tasks and funding associated with the grants. The timeline for HCP development is influenced by a number of factors including the timing and availability of grant funding, occurrence of hydrologic conditions required for species surveys and fish passage analysis, participation of State and Federal Agencies in the development and review process, and public and stakeholder participation. Based on the current timeline, the administrative drafts of the HCP are estimated to be completed in 2025 with the final HCP and associated permits completed in 2027.

Accomplishments to date include:

- Adoption of the HCP Charter between the Agency, NMFS, USFWS
- Completion of the Gabilan/Tembladero watershed assessment
- Completion of least Bell's vireo surveys
- Completion of a Salinas River Lagoon wetland delineation
- Assessment of habitat and fish passage barriers in the Arroyo Seco
- A report on striped bass in the Salinas basin
- Completion of Salinas Lagoon surveys for steelhead and tidewater goby
- Development of draft HCP chapters 1-3

Current priorities include:

- Development of a Low-Effect HCP for emergency sandbar management
- A critical riffle analysis to determine fish passage needs in the lower Salinas and Arroyo Seco rivers
- Dam passage feasibility study

Staff provides regular updates on the status of the HCP to the Agency's Planning Committee and periodic updates to the Reservoir Operations Advisory Committee.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

MCWRA meets regularly with staff from the National Marine Fisheries Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to discuss core components of the HCP.

FINANCING:

The grant funding agreements will make available a total of two million dollars in reimbursable Federal funds and \$750,000 in reimbursable State funds.

The 2019 Section 6 grant from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) provides \$1,000,000 in grant funds and will require \$375,860 of in-kind funding to be provided through Agency staff time and Agency-funded consultant expenses. A significant portion of the in-kind funding for the 2019 grant was accrued through staff and consultant work performed while waiting on the completion of the grant agreement.

The 2021 Section 6 grant from USFWS provides \$1,000,000 in grant funds and will require \$459,096 of in-kind funding. In-kind funding will be met through a combination of work performed using State funds provided by an Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) grant and staff hours.

The Agency was awarded \$750,000 in State of California Proposition 1 grant funding through the IRWM Program that will assist with identifying flow requirements for steelhead passage in the Salinas River and identify reservoir operational scenarios necessary to meet the identified passage requirements. A portion of this State grant funded work will be applied as non-Federal in-kind funding in the amount of \$375,000 toward the 2021 Section 6 Grant.

The approved FY23 Agency budget contains staff time and reimbursable funds for HCP development

within Agency Fund 116. The remaining reimbursable and in-kind funds under this grant will be identified in future Agency budgets.

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