



Putah Creek Irrigators Meeting Outcomes Summary

Meeting Overview

Meeting Details

Meeting Date: Wednesday, March 20th, 12:30 - 2:30 PM

Meeting Location: In-person at RCD Conference Room, 1170 North Lincoln Street, Suite 109

Total Participant Count: 12 Attendees

Meeting Objectives

- Learn about Solano County Water Agency's (SCWA) proposal to manage Putah Creek this year
- Agree on how to manage Putah Creek this year
- Discuss any next steps or information needs

Meeting Agenda

12:30 - 1:00	Welcome & Lunch
1:00 - 1:15	Meeting Overview
1:15 - 2:25	Putah Creek Water Management 2024 Proposals
2:25 - 2:30	Summary and Adjourn

Meeting Materials

View the Meeting [Invite Here](#)

View the Irrigator Meeting [Presentation here](#)



Meeting Outcomes

Spring Pulse Flows (March/April)

Summary

Dr. Max Stevenson, Putah Creek Streamkeeper, shares how the Spring Pulse Flows are required by the Accord and mimics snow run-off melt. Pulse flows help to protect the salmon. The Spring pulse flow consists of three consecutive days sometime in March or April of flows of first 150 Cubic Feet per Second (CFS), then 100 CFS, and lastly 80 CFS. This year SCWA released above those CFS requirements because of recent wet years and the glory hole was predicted to spill. At the end of the three days there are 30 days of 50 CFS required at the compliance point at I80. At the conclusion of the 30 days the flow is decreased to match the required Accord flows.

Outcomes

This year SCWA started the Spring Pulse Flows on March 14th. SCWA will release whatever water is needed to meet that I80 compliance point. The group discussed the potential of coordinating future spring pulse flows to support the rice-field flooding needs of the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area (YBWA). However, the YBWA does not start flooding its field until the beginning - middle May. The group agreed to the current Spring Pulse Flows strategy.

Riparian Water Deliveries (April - July)

Summary

Dr. Stevenson shared context on how the previous SCWA General Manager, David Okita, recognized it was complicated to determine riparian water for pumping vs environmental water. Okita devised a system to float riparian water on top of the environmental flows, but irrigators would have to call SCWA to order water and there would be a cut off date of July 15th. SCWA now calls this the 2008 Riparian Accommodation Rules. Dr. Stevenson shared the following proposal for 2024 Riparian water deliveries:

- SCWA will continue to follow the 2008 Riparian Accommodation Rules which allows irrigators to divert creek water until July 15th. Diverters must call SCWA to order water.
- SCWA requests that irrigators call SCWA to call in orders for both pumping on and off. This will require irrigators to coordinate with SCWA and other pumpers because it can take up to 2-3 days for water to be released from the Diversion Dam and reach the lower part of Putah Creek.
- Call or Text Zach Hyer (707) 898-0064 (or Jay Cuetara (707) 249-3695) to schedule water both on and off.
 - Above I-80 call one day before, by 2 pm.
 - Below I-80 call two days before, by 2 pm.
- SCWA will comply with the 5 CFS regulation (April/Map) at the Toe Drain compliance point
- SCWA will record how much flow is being called-in and observed-pumping by riparian users

Outcomes

- Optimization of CFS flows reaching the Toe Drain will require coordination among the YBWA, Los Rios Farms, and SCWA. The YBWA discussed how it has a lift station above the check dam. Once water goes below the check dam that water goes straight to the toe drain. The base lift station can move water to the west outside the levees, but it also pushes water south at a diversion and dumps into Putah Creek right above the check dam. YBWA could potentially divert that water from the base lift and drop it into Putah Creek if the boards are in. That water could then be diverted by YBWA and Los Rios Farms. The YBWA diverts the water from the base lift through gravity to use on the wetlands or they use the lift stations to divert for agriculture or fall flood-out.



- Irrigator asked how SCWA plans to manage the 5 CFS requirement at the Toe Drain when there's water coming from the creek vs water being pumped in and out at the base lift.
 - Response: Meeting the 5 CFS requirements in the Accord will be a new goal for SCWA this year. Ultimately it's an experiment and these requirements will be beneficial for diverters because SCWA will be releasing whatever water is needed to meet the Toe Drain compliance point.
- Further clarification was given on how depending on the year the cow dairies located downstream may have extra water needs. If it's a dry March the dairy's may want to pull water from the creek to irrigate their pasture.
- YBWA shared that from a wetland management standpoint they are drawing wetlands down during the spring so they don't want to irrigate units until late May or June. Based on that, YBWA has no issues with this proposal.
- Irrigators agreed with the proposal.
- SCWA will be taking more measurements this year to see how this approach works.
- Need for coordination with Los Rios to discuss strategies for how SCWA can verify the 5 CFS flow at the Toe Drain.

Riparian Water Cut Off Diversion Date (July 15)

Summary

Dr. Stevenson explained that for 2024 SCWA will release water that is requested by irrigators up until July 15th. SCWA expects surface water diversions to end after July 15th, which marks the end of riparian water rights for that season. However, the pumping of wheeling water is a complicated issue. Dr. Stevenson shared how SCWA is aware that Los Rios has a well and that irrigators downstream are pumping in from the toe drain, which is used for wheeling. Alex Rabidoux, Assistant General Manager of SCWA, shared how this year the major goal is to not let the creek go dry after July 15th and to reach above zero compliance. SCWA has an obligation to comply with the toe drain requirement, but this has historically been complicated to comply with because there are a lot of complexities in the lower end of the creek. Alex affirms this year is about getting a better pulse on the lower end and avoiding dewatering the creek. The SCWA staff shared this proposal with irrigators:

- SCWA will work with the Riparian users to provide the needed water up until July 15, then they expect all surface water diversions to end
- Pumping of wheeled water needs to be discussed
- This is a cutoff date that has been used in the past and has worked well to help us meet the required accord flows above I-80. PCWM is focusing on below I-80.
- SCWA may not comply with 'continuous flow' requirement below I-80 during the summer and early fall due to wheeling complexities and permanent barriers in the Creek outside of control by SCWA

Outcomes

- Creek diverters are not allowed to pump creek water after July 15th. If an irrigator is pumping creek water past the July 15th cut-off date, SCWA will note this and send a letter to the pumper notifying them of this observation.



- Irrigators discussed how SCWA will know whether it's riparian water or wheeling water. Key points:
 - Is it most complex near Los Rios Farms where there are deep wells, people pumping in, tail water going in, and no one is measuring every single intake. The indicator for SCWA is when they see the level at the check dam going down, which is how they determine more water is going out than is going in.
 - SCWA staff did not know that Paschoal farms was buying water through the Hedrick spill. They thought the water coming in from Yolo was free water. SCWA was reassessing how much water to release based on an assumption that they were getting free water from Yolo.
 - Other Irrigators expressed interest in purchasing water from Yolo County Flood Control.
- Irrigators need to let SCWA know when they have purchased water from other sources like the Yolo County Flood Control, so SCWA does not account for that as "free water." Yolo County Flood Control can also share their order information with SCWA so they know how much purchased water is being wheeled through Putah Creek.
- One of the concerns is that some irrigators may be taking advantage of the system and SCWA does not have a strategy for accounting for that potential.
- SCWA will be taking more measurements this year to see how this approach works.
- SCWA needs to be working with Los Rios Farms, YBWA, and the other irrigators in that area because of the complexities. Accounting for the water flows coming off the lift pumps, internal operations, or the Solano Project into Putah Creek is helpful for all parties. There is a need for both in-person and phone call communications to ensure water users are aware of this proposal and the need and strategy for taking more water flow measurement.

Fall Pulse Flow & Check Dam Boards (November)

Summary

Alex Rabidou shared context for how SCWA is obligated by law to comply with 5 CFS at the Toe drain in the fall, which has historically been hard for SCWA to comply with. Compliance has been difficult because during the fall the creek has many uses including pumping for flood operation, Delta conveyance, and salmon migration. Additional context was given by Dr. Stevenson about salmon migration occurring mainly from early October - Late November. Dr. Stevenson shared the following proposal for 2024 Fall Pulse Flow and Check Dam Boards:

- SCWA will comply with 5 cfs at Toe Drain Nov/Dec 15
- We would also like to coordinate with Los Rios and CDFW to run the check dam boards in a way to help us ensure compliance with the Accord.
- The Fall pulse flow consists of maintaining 50 cfs at Los Rios Check dam for 5 days then drops down to 19 cfs at Interstate 80 through March 31.
- CDFW grant \$825,000 for Check Dam Fish Bypass

Outcomes

- Irrigators discussed the wheeling timeline and how it affects the check dam board removal. Key points:
 - YBWA shared how the wheeling timeline depends on the year. In October, YBWA is not irrigating pasture anymore, but is using water to flood the wetlands. But if the boards are pulled at the check dams, the YBWA is not going to be running the pumps because they cannot get the water



- to the lift station. Ideally YBWA needs water in October for the field flooding. By November they are close to being done.
- Doing the board removal and the pulse flows in early October is difficult because salmon are moving into a system that has wheeling needs, field flooding use, and end of season activities.
 - Dr. Stevenson shared the idea to have two Putah creeks downstream, one for wheeling and conveyance and another creek for fish passage.
 - Response: That idea would alleviate some of the issues and it's great to evaluate how to address fish passage. However, if you are talking about Putah creek realignment that would have a huge impact on the YBWA.
 - Further clarification was given on how the bypass channel would not be designed for 50 CFS, but instead for 5-10 CFS, so that the salmon would have a nonstop passage.
 - Irrigators explain the complications with taking the check dam boards in and out. Key points:
 - For SCWA it extends and complicates management of the creek because of the increased monitoring, flood control, fish passage, and coordination with land owners.
 - YBWA does not want to start flooding the fields and then have to stop. Last year after the boards were pulled the lift pump was not turned on again. YBWA is coordinating with other water users so they do not pull water from the check dam after the boards are put in and then taken out.
 - Alex Rabidou recommends that we create a proposal that recognizes the nuances and balances the needs. SCWA knows that last year's check dam board removal in mid Oct did not work for users. He asked if we can choose a date sometime in early November, such as Nov 4th.
 - Irrigators discussed how to accommodate salmon migration needs that occur Oct - Nov. Key points:
 - YBWA shared how they can accommodate fish passage, they just need to be able to plan. If they need to use lift pumps and gravity feeds it will have a big financial impact and take more time to get the wildlife habitat established.
 - The group acknowledged both fish and wildlife habitat needs are important.
 - In 2023, the check dam boards were removed in mid-October and had big negative impacts on the water users downstream.
 - Irrigators agreed we need to investigate and ask fish biologists for current migration needs and spawning data. Key points:
 - Do the fish that are located at Lisbon Weir in the Toe Drain wait to migrate into the creek until the pulse flows?
 - Response: The fish typically go to the Wallace Weir Fish Rescue Facility. Last year they had about 500-600 fish. The fish have a choice because there is a T where the fish can go left to Putah Creek or straight up the toe drain to the fish rescue facility. The facility then has to truck the fish back to Sacramento River because of permits.
 - Irrigators agreed we need current information on whether it's okay for fish spawning to wait until early November for pulse flows. This information will help inform the check dam board removal and pulse flow timeline.
 - Irrigators agreed we need a 2024 draft date regarding check dam board removal to share with water users to get their input.



Communicate with other irrigators and SCWA about pumping

Summary

SCWA shared the proposal for 2024 communication with other irrigators and SCWA about pumping:

- Call or Text Zach Hyer (707) 898-0064 (or Jay Cuetara (707) 249-3695) to schedule water both on and off.
- Above I-80 call one day before, by 2 pm.
- Below I-80 call two days before, by 2 pm.
- Unique ID for pumps to be made?
- New stickers for pumps? Flow measurement check with strap-on meter?
- Call sheet for all pumpers (share map and phone numbers)?
- After March 20th meeting, we will send a note to the farmers with the plan

Outcomes

- Irrigators agreed having a call sheet with pumper contact information would be helpful for irrigation coordination.
- There is a need for SCWA staff to be able to communicate with Spanish speakers. Many grower operations have Spanish-speaking workers who would prefer to text rather than call.
- Irrigators agreed to having unique pump ID's. They agreed to try the river mile system for ID's. The group also discussed how ID's may be different with electric vs diesel pumps.
- Irrigators agreed they would like to have new stickers with contact information to put on their pumps.
- Irrigators agreed to have another meeting in February 2025 to check-in about see what did and did not work on 2024 PCWM strategies.
- Irrigators agreed it is important to explain to the general public the amount of wheeling that goes on in Putah Creek. There is misunderstanding on water flows and explaining wheeling dynamics will help correct misguided assumptions.