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PROVIDING SERVICE SINCE 1948

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## New Agreement will Conserve Threatened Steelhead and Secure Water Operations on the Calaveras River for 50 Years

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Stockton East Water District  
Stockton, CA

Monday, September 14, 2020

NOAA Fisheries has approved a final Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP), sponsored by Stockton East Water District (Stockton East), for the Calaveras River that is designed to protect threatened fish species while also providing long-term security for crucial water operations through 2070. As part of this long-term agreement, NOAA fisheries has issued a 50-year Incidental Take Permit (ITP) for the operations and maintenance of Stockton East facilities on the river. In turn, Stockton East has committed to an array of conservation actions to benefit fish populations on the Calaveras River over that time period.

The Water District is proud that the Calaveras River supports a healthy steelhead population, said General Manager Scot A. Moody. “The District is thrilled that it can support the fishery while at the same time protecting the needs of our agricultural and municipal water users,” he said. “We’re making a commitment, and we get some certainty in return.”

“This is an exciting step in conserving steelhead in a lasting way that works for everyone,” said Erin Strange, NOAA Fisheries Supervisory Fishery Biologist for the San Joaquin River Basin. “We’re committed to partnering with Stockton East and other stakeholders on the Calaveras River to support a healthy watershed and reliable water supply.”

The HCP’s fish conservation actions primarily focus on Central Valley steelhead, which are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Rainbow trout and Chinook salmon will also benefit. Conservation actions include a guaranteed minimum flow in key fish habitat, screening water diversions, improving fish passage over structures, water conservation measures, and continued fisheries research and monitoring on the Calaveras River to inform management. Annual summertime monitoring has shown that the Calaveras supports a healthy population of rainbow trout, some of which turn into steelhead. Although the population declined during the peak of the recent drought, it has since recovered to pre-drought abundance levels.

“There is something here for everyone,” said Monica Gutierrez, Fisheries Biologist, who has led the development of the HCP for NOAA Fisheries’ Central Valley Office in Sacramento. “The Water District gets security and predictability in its water supply while we are also improving conditions for fish in key habitat at a critical time.”

The plan covers the area of the lower Calaveras River from New Hogan Reservoir to the confluence with the San Joaquin River. Stockton East makes water available to a population of 358,000 within the greater Stockton urban area, approximately 6,373 agricultural parcels, and includes of approximately 143,000 acres located in San Joaquin and Calaveras counties. The HCP and issuance of the ITP protects existing uses of water in the District from alleged violations of the ESA, providing stability and continuity for both water operations and conservation measures.

The final plan is the culmination of a 13-year plus effort. Stockton East has invested significant funding in the development of the plan since 2003, and will commit an estimated \$200,000 to \$400,000 per year to implement the activities of the HCP moving forward, as well as the cost of fish screens and other improvements required by the HCP.

HCPs are planning documents related to the “take” of threatened and endangered species, which includes killing, injuring, capturing, or harassing a species. The plans include the anticipated impacts of activities or development on sensitive species, as well as how those impacts will be minimized or mitigated. Since HCPs were first developed in 1982, some 400 have been finalized nationwide; however, this is the first HCP completed by NOAA Fisheries in the Central Valley.

"This plan is a result of an incredible amount of work over several years -- it's a testament to the dedication of Stockton East Water District and our NOAA Fisheries staff who put immense energy and creativity into developing an approach that provides the infrastructure, science, and species protections to meet everyone's needs," said Cathy Marcinkevage, NOAA Assistant Regional Administrator.

More information about the plan, including a new video, is available on the SEWD website at: <https://sewd.net/habitat-conservation-plan/>

**End of Release**