

\$20 million plan to aid salmon in lower Yuba

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The state Department of Water Resources and Pacific Gas & Electric have developed an estimated \$20 million plan to improve salmon spawning in the lower Yuba River.

The proposal is part of a larger program to bolster the populations of spring-run Chinook salmon and steelhead in the Sacramento River basin.

The goal is to expand habitat for 3,000 spring-run Chinook.

The state agency and PG&E released a draft of their plan last month.

A public meeting is scheduled in mid-January in Marysville. No specific date or location have been set. Public comments on the plan will be accepted through Feb. 18.

The draft plan runs about 420 pages. Other areas proposed for habitat expansion are Battle Creek south of Redding, Big Chico Creek near Chico and Antelope Creek near Red Bluff, collectively dubbed the Three Creeks Action.

Along the lower Yuba, the plan envisions:

- Rehabilitating spawning habitat just downstream of Englebright Reservoir and augmenting gravel in Deer Creek, a Yuba River tributary.
- Building a fall- and spring-run Chinook salmon segregation weir between Englebright and the Highway 20 bridge.
- Restoring juvenile rearing habitat between the bridge and the downstream extent of the Yuba Goldfields.

The report says these actions could generate a net increase of 3,450 spring-run Chinook salmon and are "an excellent opportunity" to meet the plan's goals in less than 10 years.

Actions proposed on the other three rivers are estimated to generate about 2,250 salmon.

The plan says either the lower Yuba proposal or the Three Creeks Action will be chosen, but not both.

The lower Yuba runs for 24 miles from Englebright to the confluence of the Feather and Yuba rivers. Daguerre Point Dam and Englebright are considered barriers to fish migration.

The Department of Water Resources and PG&E started to develop a salmon enhancement plan two years ago as an alternative to a "trap-and-haul" program for the Feather River proposed by the National Marine Fisheries Service.

That effort would have involved trapping adult fish below Oroville Dam, hauling them

upstream and placing them in the upper North Fork Feather River.

"The trap-and-haul program generated concern because of its high estimated cost and the potentially low likelihood for success," according to the study.

The salmon issue arose because the state and PG&E have relicense applications pending before the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission for their facilities. The state operates Oroville Dam.

PG&E has the Poe Hydroelectric Project, the Upper North Fork Feather River Hydroelectric Project and the Rock Creek-Cresta Hydroelectric Project.