

## Yuba Water asks to cut its output

By Ben van der Meer/Appeal-Democrat  
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The Yuba County Water Agency is asking reduce the water it releases in early 2010, owing to both the state's ongoing drought and a need for consistent flows to help fish populations.

In a letter sent by YCWA general manager Curt Aikens to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission on Monday, the agency requested what's known as a flow deviation from Jan. 1-15.

Under the request, the agency would only release 600 cubic feet per second during those two weeks, instead of the normal 1,000 cubic feet per second requirement by FERC then.

"The purpose of this request is to eliminate the potential detrimental effects on incubating eggs and juvenile salmonids caused by a two week flow increase and subsequent decrease that can occur during drier water conditions," Aikens wrote in the letter, explaining 600 cubic feet per second is the requirement for the Yuba before and after Jan. 1-15.

Aikens also notes Bullards Bar Reservoir is at 43 percent of capacity, with rainfall and runoff below normal over the last two years.

Agency Vice Chairman Tib Belza said more recent storms weren't a factor in the decision to send the letter.

"We're hoping for a wet year," he said. "But regardless, there's still other places that'll be short of water, and it's nice to be able to hold back some now to possibly help them out later."

Belza said a management team formed after the completion of the Yuba River Water Accord is taking a more hands-on role in the river's health, but it's too soon to know whether a deviation in January will become a regular occurrence.

Earlier this month, Aikens also sent letters to officials in Sacramento with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the state Department of Fish and Game asking for their concurrence in the request. Aikens' letter to FERC does not suggest when the commission will rule on the request.

Aikens was not available for comment last week.

Wildlife and water experts are partnering in a comprehensive effort to enhance salmon runs on the Yuba River, part of restoring the fish's overall population in Northern California rivers and streams.

Salmon runs have declined drastically in recent years for reasons unknown, though some suspect climate change impacts in the Pacific Ocean and water diversions in the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta to Southern California as causes.

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