

REGION: Scientists begin releasing thousands of tagged salmon for study

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SACRAMENTO – California Department of Water Resources (DWR) and U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) scientists on Friday began a comprehensive three-month study of salmon migration through the Bay-Delta.

This new study comes in the wake of a salmon population crash which resulted in the state and federal government closing the commercial salmon fishing season off the coast of California and part of Oregon this spring.

Data gathered from the study will help agencies better manage the Bay-Delta ecosystem while enhancing habitat for salmon and other protected species and providing a scientific foundation for water policy, ecosystem and salmon fishery decision makers.

“Ultimately, with the data collected from this study, we hope to find ways to improve Delta water quality and water supply reliability for the State Water Project while protecting the salmon out-migrant population,” said Jim Wilde, DWR Senior Engineer coordinating the study for DWR.

Over the course of the study, scientists will release 6,000 tagged juvenile salmon into the Sacramento River to track their migration to the ocean.

Released salmon are implanted with acoustic transmitters that allow scientists to monitor their movements at junctions of waterways and throughout the Delta.

The transmitters are uniquely programmed for immediate detection and identification by an array of unmanned, robotic boats and electronic gear.

The high-tech experiment continues for the next three months between Sacramento and Pittsburg and will gather data on route selection and survival of the Sacramento River winter run of juvenile salmon.

Every year thousands of juvenile Chinook salmon migrate out of streams in the Central Valley and move through the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta on their way to the Pacific Ocean. How young salmon move through the Delta, however, is not well understood.

“This is an evolving story. We don’t have the answers, but we are using the latest science and technology to find them,” said USGS hydrologist Jon Burau, one of the study’s lead scientists. “This is an example of interagency cooperation across many scientific disciplines and offices. Scientists will be putting in thousands of hours over the next few months to understand how juvenile salmon migrate through the Delta.”

Collected data will be used to develop management tools capable of estimating how current operations and potential new projects may impact out-migrating juvenile salmon.

The field experiment will involve many scientific disciplines and the use of emerging technologies in fisheries science and hydrodynamic measurement.

Clear Lake also is connected to the Bay-Delta, which it empties into via Cache and Putah creeks, and the Yolo Bypass in the Sacramento Valley.

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