



Government Relations Update September 2022

This report focuses on Sonoma Water's federal affairs efforts. For more information, please contact Brad Sherwood, Assistant General Manager, at 707-322-8192 or sherwood@scwa.ca.gov.

Issue: Sub-seasonal to Seasonal (S2S) Precipitation Forecasting

We continued to coordinate efforts to advocate for a \$15 million Fiscal Year 2023 (FY2023) appropriation to begin a Western pilot project for improving sub-seasonal to seasonal (S2S) precipitation forecasting. On July 28th, Senate introduced the Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 2023, which includes \$1 million for the pilot. While the amount is lower than requested, the language included was exactly what Sonoma Water and other participants in the S2S Precipitation Forecasting Coalition recommended. As previously reported, the House version of the measure did not include an appropriation for the pilot. Our efforts will now turn to advocating for inclusion of the provision in the final FY2023 appropriations package that will be taken up after the November midterm elections.

We conducted a briefing for stakeholders who supported the FY2023 funding request as well as a trip to Washington, DC that included Sonoma Water staff and other coalition members. We met with leadership at NOAA, House and Senate authorizing and appropriation committee staff, as well as members from the CA delegation. There is significant support for S2S and we will continue to push for increased funding at NOAA.

Issue: Advanced Quantitative Precipitation Information (AQPI)

We continue to pursue federal funding for the Advanced Quantitative Precipitation Information (AQPI) program. Building on efforts to engage with lawmakers through education efforts and a stakeholder letter signed by over a dozen water managers in the Bay Area to advocate for \$4.8 million in FY 2023 federal funding, we have continued to work with Senator Padilla and Representative Huffman, who are serving as congressional champions on the AQPI funding request.

We are working to send a new letter from Bay area entities in support of the Senate language in the final appropriations bill to House and Senate leadership.

Issue: Forecast Informed Reservoir Operations

In addition to the efforts related to S2S and AQPI noted above, we have engaged to identify ways to improve forecasting and associated water allocation and flood control decisions at Lake Sonoma and Lake Mendocino.

On July 28th, the Senate introduced the Energy and Water Development and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 2023, which includes \$10.5 million for the Water Operations Technical Support (WOTS) Program. The explanatory statement accompanying the bill recommends allocating \$6 million for water control manual updates for non-Corps owned high hazard dams and additional funding for water control manuals at Corps-owned projects located in States where a Reclamation project is also located. The statement also notes that lawmakers are pleased with the results of FIRO Phases 1 and 2 and recommends allocation of funds to complete Phase 2, start Phase 3.

The House version of the measure, which was passed by that chamber on July 20th, includes \$8 million for the WOTS Program. Both the House and Senate funding levels are above the \$550,000 request that was included in the President's FY2023 budget in March. The final appropriation will be determined when a deal is reached on a FY2023 appropriations package after the November midterm elections.

Issue: Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund (PCSRF)

As noted above, on July 28th, Senate introduced the Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 2023, which includes which includes \$65 million for the Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund. This level is consistent with the amount enacted in FY2022, the request included in the President's FY2023 budget proposal, and the appropriation included in the House version of the measure. Since the program's inception in FY2000, due in part to Sonoma Water's leadership and ongoing advocacy efforts, PCSRF has received \$1.685 billion in federal funding. While it is likely that \$65 million will be included for the fiscal year, the final appropriation will be determined when a deal is reached on a FY2023 appropriations package after the November midterm elections.

Issue: Implementation of Russian River Biological Opinion

We continue to support efforts to secure funding for operation and maintenance of infrastructure critical to successful implementation of the Russian River Biological Opinion that has been in place since 2008. As noted above, on July 28th the Senate introduced the Energy and Water Development and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 2023, which includes \$6.054 million for Operations and Maintenance (O&M) at Coyote Valley Dam and \$8.369 million for O&M at Dry Creek (Warm Springs) to support, among other things, dam safety and hatchery operations. The House version of the measure, which includes the same funding levels, was passed by that chamber on July 20th. These levels also are consistent with the amounts enacted in FY2022 and the requests included in the President's FY2023 budget proposal. The final appropriation will be determined when a deal is reached on a FY2023 appropriations package after the November midterm elections.

Issue: Invasive Species – Watercraft Inspections

As noted above, on July 28th the Senate introduced the Energy and Water Development and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 2023, which includes \$16 million to establish (as applicable), operate and maintain new or existing watercraft inspection and decontamination. The funding was specifically directed to four projects (\$4 million each), one of which is the Russian River Basin. The final appropriation will be determined when a deal is reached on a FY2023 appropriations package after the November midterm elections.

Issue: Federal Response to Western Wildfires and Drought

In September, Senators Manchin (D-WV) and Barrasso (R-WY), who are the chair and ranking member of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, introduced the Promoting Effective Forest Management Act of 2022. It seeks to reduce wildlife risk by improve the pace and scale of forest management by:

- directing the Forest Service and BLM to set annual acreage targets for mechanical thinning projects on National Forests and public lands.
- requiring the Forest Service and BLM to gain familiarity with their existing authorities (including existing categorical exclusions and emergency authorities) to increase their use. Currently, these authorities often go unused, significantly slowing down projects.
- legislating that any attempts to redefine scientific terms (e.g., old-growth forests, mature forests) must be based in science and in law.
- requiring the Forest Service to report if the National Forests are absorbing more carbon than they are emitting (for example, from wildfires or disease-induced mortality).
- allowing counties to speak in court about the impacts on their communities of halting wildfire prevention projects in National Forests.
- helping stop the current forfeiture of retirement benefits for those firefighters that wish to attend to things like maternity leave and have more than a 3-day break-in-service.
- improving the quality and availability of logging workforce training and apprenticeship programs.
- directing the Forest Service to encourage employees to become more rooted in their communities, thereby fostering better long-term partnerships between the agency and their state, local, and industry partners.

Issue: Inflation Reduction Act

The Department of the Interior recently announced a process for applying for federal funding through the Inflation Reduction Act, which includes \$4 billion specifically for water management and conservation efforts in the Colorado River Basin and other areas experiencing similar levels of drought. The Department says that it will solicit short-term conservation contributions and longer-term durable system efficiency projects. Longer-term projects could include initiatives such as canal lining, re-regulating reservoirs, ornamental and non-functional turf removal, salinity projects and other infrastructure. Projects could also be related to aquatic ecosystem restoration and impacts mitigation, crop water efficiency, rotational fallowing, and marginal land idling.

Issue: Water Resources Development Act

Lawmakers in the House and Senate are working to advance their respective versions of the Water Resources Development Act, biennial legislation that authorizes flood control, navigation, and ecosystem restoration projects for the U.S Army Corps of Engineers (Corps). As previously reported, the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee approved its version of the legislation on May 4th by a 20-0 vote. The full House approved its bill on June 8th by vote of 384 – 37. Negotiations between House and Senate lawmakers are ongoing with the goal of passing a final package by the end of the year.