



California Department of Fish & Wildlife | NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service | Yuba County Water Agency
American Rivers | California Sportfishing Protection Alliance | Trout Unlimited

YUBA SALMON PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE

Project Summary and Update—May 2015

The Yuba Salmon Partnership Initiative (YSPI) is the product of exceptional collaboration between California's Department of Fish and Wildlife, NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service, the Yuba County Water Agency, American Rivers, California Sportfishing Protection Alliance and Trout Unlimited. Over the past year, this group has worked together to develop a program to reintroduce spring-run Chinook salmon, and perhaps steelhead, to the North Yuba River upstream of New Bullards Bar Dam and a related program to enhance salmonid habitat downstream of Englebright Dam. On May 7, 2015, the YSPI released a framework for an agreement: a "Term Sheet" that will guide negotiations toward a binding settlement agreement; forming the basis of salmon reintroduction and restoration programs in the Yuba River watershed.

Background

The Yuba River watershed plunges from the crest of the Sierra Nevada to the level farmland of the Sacramento Valley. It historically supported large salmon and steelhead runs, including threatened spring-run Chinook salmon that summer at high-elevations in river pools before spawning in the fall.

Gold Rush-era mining took an especially heavy toll on the Yuba. The California Debris Commission built several dams on the lower Yuba River to hold back gravel and silt washed downstream by hydraulic mining. Englebright Dam, constructed in 1941 and now owned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), holds back over 28 million cubic yards of debris. While this 260 foot high dam has prevented the release of this sediment into the Sacramento River system, it also completely blocks salmon passage into the upper watershed.

In 1970, the Yuba County Water Agency built the 640 foot high New Bullards Bar Dam, upstream of Englebright Dam. The dam created the 16 mile long New Bullards Bar Reservoir, which collects water from the North Yuba River and the Middle Yuba River and helps prevent floods downstream in Yuba and Sutter counties. This facility, built and managed for flood control, irrigation, and hydropower purposes, also provides environmental and recreation benefits and supplies water to roughly 80,000 acres of farmland in Yuba County.

Englebright Dam and New Bullards Bar Dam are too tall for conventional fish ladders. Nonetheless, Yuba River salmon have endured. The lower Yuba is home to wild runs of both salmon and steelhead. Unlike nearby rivers, the Yuba has no fish hatchery (though straying of hatchery fish from other rivers is an ongoing concern).

The Yuba Salmon Partnership Initiative (YSPI): Where We Are Today

For over 15 years, government agencies and conservation groups have been exploring the possibility of reintroducing spring-run Chinook salmon and perhaps steelhead to the North Yuba River. Their attention was focused on the North Yuba River upstream of New Bullards Bar Dam because it has one of the longest river reaches of good salmon habitat in the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range.

The partners—California’s Department of Fish and Wildlife, NOAA’s National Marine Fisheries Service, the Yuba County Water Agency, American Rivers, California Sportfishing Protection Alliance and Trout Unlimited—completed and signed a “Term Sheet” on May 7, 2015 and thus committed to a series of collaborative steps to launch the Yuba Salmon Partnership Initiative.

Through this ambitious initiative, partners are committing to a pioneering, long-term endeavor: to reintroduce salmon to the North Yuba. The reintroduction program, if implemented as envisioned in the Term Sheet, would return salmon to the spawning habitat in the North Yuba River using specially designed collection facilities. Tanker trucks would transport salmon to the North Yuba River (upstream of New Bullards Bar Dam) and its approximately 30 miles of historic habitat where salmon last spawned over 74 years ago. The program would collect and safely transport juvenile salmon downstream in the winter and spring by gathering them in collection facilities above New Bullards Bar Dam and trucking them downstream past the dams to resume their journey to the Pacific Ocean. The reintroduction effort would focus first on spring-run Chinook salmon. If successful, a steelhead reintroduction could follow.

Additional examples of actions in the May 2015 Term Sheet include:

- improving salmon habitat in the lower Yuba River downstream of Englebright Dam;
- extensive scientific monitoring;
- operation and maintenance of the collection and passage facilities; and
- administrative actions under federal and state endangered species acts to protect landowners, tribes, and other interests from certain liabilities while working to reintroduce salmon.

Looking Ahead

Though untried in California, agencies and utilities in Oregon and Washington have been successfully transporting salmon past dams for many years. Such an effort in California fits Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr.’s goals, spelled out in the January 2014 California Water Action Plan, of eliminating barriers to fish migration, addressing fish passage at major Sierra dams, and restoring important ecosystems.

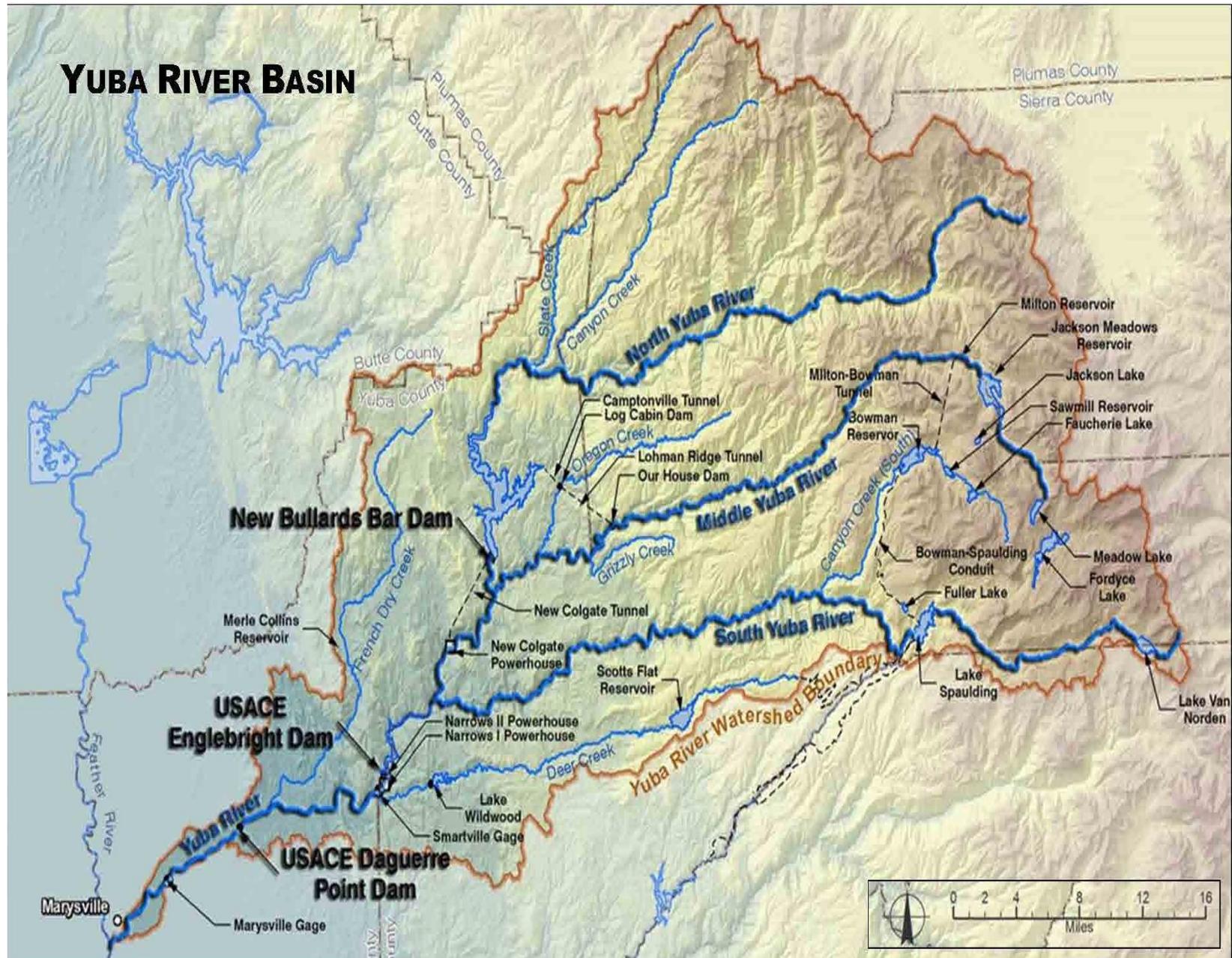
The reintroduction program would also fit with the National Marine Fisheries Service’s Recovery Plan for steelhead and spring-run Chinook salmon. That 2014 plan calls for a program to bring spring-run and

steelhead back to habitat upstream of Englebright Dam.

There is still a lot of work to do. In signing the non-binding Term Sheet, the partners commit to negotiating a more in-depth and binding settlement agreement over the course of the next year. The Term Sheet discusses fiscal responsibility and funding, agrees to some limits on potential actions, and anticipates how the partners will seek to address numerous legal and regulatory requirements. The partners have also committed to the use of a transparent, science-based process that offers opportunities for public review in developing the specifics of the anticipated programs.

In a separate but related process, USACE is assessing the feasibility of fishery habitat restoration and enhancement actions on the lower Yuba River, including improving fish passage at Daguerre Point Dam (downstream from Englebright and 11 miles from the confluence of the Yuba River). The USACE study (the Yuba River Ecosystem Feasibility Study) is scheduled to be completed in 2018.

The Yuba County Water Agency has committed up to \$100 million to the YSPI Partnership Initiative over the next 50 years. Total project costs over the life of the programs are estimated to be roughly \$400-\$500 million (2015 dollars). Local, state and federal funds will also be considered for the program.



Yuba River Watershed