Notice of Preparation

To: Responsible, Federal and Trustee Agencies (Agency)
From: California Department of Fish and Game
1234 E. Shaw Avenue
(Address)
Fresno, CA 93710

Subject: **Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report for the San Joaquin River Restoration Program – Salmon Conservation and Research Facility (SCARF) and Related Management Actions Project**

The California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) is the lead agency and is preparing an environmental impact report (EIR) for the San Joaquin River Restoration Program– SCARF and Related Management Actions Project (Proposed Project or Project). CDFG would like input from interested individuals, public agencies, and/or other parties regarding the scope and content of the EIR. Agencies may need to use the EIR prepared by the CDFG when considering any permit or other authorizations related to the Proposed Project.

The project description, location, and potential environmental effects are contained in the attached materials. A copy of the initial study ☐ ***is*** ☒ ***is not*** attached.

Because of the time limits mandated by state law, your response must be sent at the earliest possible date but not later than 30 days after receipt of this notice.

Please send your response to Gerald Hatler at the address above. Please include your name or the name of a contact person in your agency.

Project Title: San Joaquin River Restoration Program – SCARF and Related Management Actions Project

Project Applicant, if any: California Department of Fish and Game

Date: November 26, 2012

Signature: for

Name: Dr. Jeffrey R. Single

Title: Regional Manager, Region 4

Telephone: (559) 243-4005

Email: jsingle@dfg.ca.gov

Reference: Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, (CEQA Guidelines) Sections 15082, subd. (a), 15103, 15375.

1. Introduction

The California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) is preparing a Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) as part of the environmental review required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Pursuant to CEQA, the DEIR will provide the public, responsible agencies, and trustee agencies with information regarding the potential environmental effects of the proposed construction and operations, consistent with the San Joaquin River Restoration Program (SJRRP), of the Salmon Conservation and Research Facility (SCARF) and Related Management Actions Project (Project or Proposed Project).

The SJRRP is the result of a settlement agreement reached through federal court action in Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) et al. v. Kirk Rodgers et al. (NRDC v. Rodgers 2006). The settlement identified two major goals of the SJRRP: a Water Management Goal and a Restoration Goal. The Restoration Goal, in turn, is to restore and maintain fish populations in good condition, including a naturally reproducing and self-sustaining population of fall- and spring-run Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*) in the Restoration Area (i.e., the mainstem San Joaquin River from Friant Dam to the confluence with the Merced River).

An MOU pertaining to the settlement agreement was entered into between several State Agencies (the California Resources Agency, Department of Water Resources, CDFG, and the California Environmental Protection Agency) and the Settling Parties (Department of Interior, Department of Commerce, NRDC, and the Friant Water Users Authority). Pursuant to the MOU and in relevant part, CDFG and the other State Agencies agreed that they intend to assist the Settling Parties in the Settlement's implementation consistent with the State Agencies' authorities, resources and broader regional resource strategies. Accordingly, in furtherance of the MOU, CDFG proposes to construct and operate the SCARF, including collection of broodstock, fish rearing and reintroduction, as well as other management activities to assist in achieving the Restoration Goal.

More information regarding the overall SJRRP can be found on the program's website: http://www.restoresjr.net/.

2. Project Area

The geographic scope of the Project encompasses portions of the San Joaquin River watershed below Friant Dam, Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta (Delta), San Francisco Bay, and Pacific Ocean accessible to salmon released under the Proposed Project. It also includes portions of the Sacramento River watershed and other watersheds where strays could enter or broodstock be collected. Broodstock collection would take place initially from Feather River Fish Hatchery and then, at later dates, from potential discrete locations within the Sacramento and San Joaquin River basins. The primary area of the Project's focus is the Restoration Area (Figure 1). The SCARF would be constructed and operated at 17372 Brook Trout Drive in Friant, Fresno County, California. This location is adjacent to the San Joaquin River approximately 1.1 miles downstream of Friant Dam, immediately west of the existing San Joaquin Fish Hatchery (existing SJFH) (Figure 2).

3. Project Purpose and Objectives

The Proposed Project's purpose is to construct and operate the SCARF for propagation of spring-run Chinook salmon, to fulfill research needs, and possibly to produce other native fish (e.g., fall-run Chinook salmon, steelhead, etc.). Spring-run Chinook salmon are listed as threatened under both the state and federal Endangered Species Acts.

The Proposed Project's objectives are as follows:

- Support and assist implementation of the Settlement Agreement reached through federal court action from NRDC v. Rogers 2006, including the following:
    - Support the Settling Parties in achieving the SJRRP Restoration Goal including but not limited to the relevant SJRRP fish population goals, and consistent with the State Agencies' authorities, resources, and broader regional resource strategies; and
    - Fulfill the other commitments identified in the MOU pertaining to the Settlement Agreement.
- Provide a controlled laboratory environment for conducting fish research.
- Fulfill CDFG's mission to manage California's diverse fish, wildlife, and plant resources, and the habitats upon which they depend, for their ecological values and for their use and enjoyment by the public.
- Fulfill CDFG's obligation to conserve, protect, and manage fish, wildlife, native plants, and habitats necessary for biologically sustainable populations of those species and as a trustee agency for fish and wildlife resources pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 1802.

4. Project Description

The Proposed Project involves the following five principle actions:

- Construction and operation of the SCARF;
- Broodstock collection for the SCARF;
- Reintroduction of Chinook salmon to the Restoration Area; and
- Conducting fish/habitat studies in support of the Restoration Goal.

More detailed descriptions of the actions that encompass the Proposed Project are included below.

4.1 Construction and Operation of the SCARF

The Proposed Project will involve construction of structures, a parking area, water supply and wastewater systems, drainage and storm water management features, an access road, and other ancillary improvements.

Structures that will be part of the SCARF include: a hatchery building; a utility building; a smolt production, captive rearing and holding facility consisting of different sized containers or vessels and piping and concrete channels for drains and volitional fish releases; and staff residences. These are described in more detail below.

Hatchery Building: The main hatchery building will be a single-story building covering approximately 8,200 square feet (ft^2). The building will include the offices of the SCARF, a breakroom/conference room, two or three restrooms, research facilities, a mud room, chemical storage, a freezer, and incubation and fry production areas.

Utility Building: The utility building will be a single-story, metal building covering approximately 900 ft^2. The building will include dry feed storage, general work and storage areas, and a pump room.

Smolt Production, Captive Rearing, Holding Facility and Release Channel: The smolt production area will consist of a number of circular culture tanks, with automatic feeders, water supply piping, side and bottom drains, and protection enclosures. The captive rearing area will consist of a number of circular culture tanks with automatic feeders, water supply piping, side and bottom drains, and protection enclosures. The existing interim hatchery at the project site will provide the adult holding and quarantine area.

A series of concrete channels will be constructed between the side drains of the fish culture tanks for draining the tanks and to provide volitional fish releases to a catch basin and the San Joaquin River. Ventria (operable openings) on the side of the circular smolt rearing tanks will allow fish to voluntarily enter the release channel system during periods of outmigration. The main channel will consist of a concrete catch basin and channel that connects the tank release systems to the secondary channel of the San Joaquin River.

Staff Residences: Up to two residences will be constructed, purchased or rented to provide housing for SCARF staff. It is anticipated that the SCARF will employ four full-time and two part-time workers.

Construction of the SCARF is anticipated to begin in late 2014 and be completed in late 2015. The first full-scale releases of fish produced by the SCARF are expected to occur in 2018 to 2019.

4.2 Broodstock Collection

Broodstock are adult fish used for breeding. Initially, Spring-run Chinook salmon will be gathered as eggs or juveniles from source populations (i.e., donor stock) to establish a successful captive broodstock at the SCARF. Potential source populations of spring-run Chinook salmon include the Feather River Fish Hatchery (FRFH), Deer/Mill Creek complex, Butte creek populations and other stocks in the Sacramento and San Joaquin River systems, such as the Stanislaus or Mokolumne River basins. The Proposed Project would implement a stepwise, iterative approach to develop broodstock. This would begin with collection of spring-run Chinook eggs and juveniles from the FRFH. Ultimately, CDFG may seek to diversify broodstock by collecting donor stock from other streams, if the spring-run Chinook populations in those streams can support collection for this purpose. Eventually,

broodstock would consist of adults returning to the SCARF. All broodstock will be genotyped for parentage-based tagging and to prepare breeding matrices, will be adipose fin clipped and tagged with Passive Integrated Transponders and Coded Wire Tags (CWT) for tracking and identification.

4.3 Fish Reintroduction

Once established, the SCARF facility is anticipated to spawn between 150-450 females annually, which would produce approximately 375,000-1,125,000 eggs per year. The total number ultimately spawned in the SCARF will be controlled by NMFS permits. Eggs and/or juveniles propagated at the FRFH may also be released. Juvenile fish and/or eggs would either be released directly to the San Joaquin River near the SCARF site, or transported to alternative release site. The eggs and/or juveniles will be monitored for health and acclimation purposes and may also be held in various holding pens or incubators for imprinting. Eggs will be incubated in enclosed incubators (i.e. designed to not allow for the release of eggs and/or fish). Once hatched, fish will be moved to holding pens for rearing until they are of adequate size for tagging. Prior to release, all fish will be adipose fin clipped and CWT. Best management practices and adaptive management techniques will be implemented to guide the reintroduction protocols and ensure that risks to other listed species would be minimized.

Reintroduction strategies will seek to manage shifting environmental conditions and added complexity associated with long-term reintroduction plans. Some of these complexities may include: changes in abundance of source populations, regulatory obligations, flow conditions/constraints, fish stocking, recreation, and passage/habitat conditions with the Restoration Area. Management of fish reintroduction will require adaptive reintroduction strategies to manage uncertainties that affect long-term reintroduction activities of both spring- and fall-run Chinook and how these uncertainties may affect future reintroduction and fisheries management. Fish reintroduction will be guided by (1) adaptively reintroducing Chinook salmon through a series of actions designed to meet established targets in a manner that accounts for the current conditions in the system and the best available science; (2) initiating reintroduction in such a way as to minimize risk to source populations and tributary populations, given their necessity and essential role in the reintroduction process and; (3) implementing reintroduction in an adaptive manner where the initial reintroduction phase will support ongoing research, inform future actions, and increase efficiency and success of future reintroduction and recovery efforts.

4.4 Fish Studies

Chinook salmon have certain habitat requirements for life stages expected to be present in the various sections of river where appropriate. Reintroducing spring and fall-run Chinook into the Restoration Area necessitates conducting scientific research studies, in coordination with the SJRRP, associated with assessing quantity of available habitat, condition of habitat, impediments to fish migration and survival, and observing responses to conditions in the Restoration Area.

5. California Environmental Quality Act Process

5.1 Notice of Preparation and Scoping Period

This NOP presents general background information on the Proposed Project, the scoping and general CEQA process, and the environmental issues to be addressed in the EIR. CDFG has prepared this NOP pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15082. The scoping period to receive comments on this NOP was initiated on November 26, 2012 and will continue for 30 days until December 26, 2012. Information is provided below on how to submit comments regarding this NOP.

5.2 Scoping Meetings

In order for the public and regulatory agencies to have an opportunity to ask questions and submit comments on the scope of the EIR, two public scoping meetings will be held during the NOP review period. The scoping meetings will solicit input from the public and interested public agencies regarding the nature and scope of environmental impacts to be addressed in the Draft EIR.

At the meetings, a brief presentation will be made in order to provide an overview of the Proposed Project and the general CEQA process. After the brief presentation, a session will follow where CDFG staff will be available to receive comments from the public about the Proposed Project. Comment forms will also be available at the scoping meetings for those who wish to submit written comments during or following the meeting. Prepared written comments will be accepted during the meetings, as well as throughout the 30-day NOP review period.

The public scoping meetings are scheduled as follows:

Scoping Meeting #1:	December 4th, 2012, from 6pm to 8pm CA Retired Teachers Association 3930 East Saginaw Way Fresno, CA 93726
Scoping Meeting #2:	December 5th, 2012, from 6pm to 8pm Department of Health Care Services and Department of Public Health Building 1500 Capitol Avenue Sacramento, CA 95814

This scoping meeting information has also been published in local newspapers and CDFG's website (http://www.dfg.ca.gov/news/pubnotice/).

5.3 Draft EIR

The primary purpose of the EIR is to analyze and disclose the reasonably foreseeable direct and indirect environmental impacts that may occur as a result of implementation of the Proposed Project. The Draft EIR, as informed by the related public and agency input, will analyze and disclose the potentially significant environmental impacts associated with the

Proposed Project and, where any such impacts are significant, identify potentially feasible mitigation measures and alternatives that substantially lessen or avoid such effects will be identified and discussed.

Below is a preliminary list of potential environmental impacts to be addressed in detail in the EIR. The analysis in the Draft EIR ultimately will determine whether these impacts are reasonably foreseeable, whether they are significant based on identified thresholds of significance, and whether they can be avoided or substantially lessened by potentially feasible mitigation measures and alternatives.

- Aesthetics
- Air quality
- Biological Resources
- Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Cultural Resources
- Geology, Seismicity, Soils
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Land Use and Planning
- Noise
- Public Services and Utilities
- Recreation
- Transportation and Traffic
- Cumulative Impacts
- Irreversible Impacts

5.4 Public Review of the Draft EIR

Once the Draft EIR is completed, it will undergo public review for a minimum of 45 days. CDFG is also planning to hold at least one public meeting to receive comments regarding the adequacy and contents of the Draft EIR. The date, time, and exact location of the public meeting(s) will be published in local newspapers and CDFG's website prior to the event.

5.5 Final EIR

Written and oral comments received in response to the Draft EIR will be addressed in a Response to Comments document which together with the Draft EIR will constitute the Final EIR. The Final EIR, in turn, will inform CDFG's exercise of discretion as a lead agency under CEQA in deciding whether to approve the Proposed Project. The Final EIR will also be used by responsible agencies and other permitting agencies in their decision-making.

6. Submittal of Scoping Comments

This NOP is being circulated to local, state, and federal agencies, and to interested organizations and individuals who may wish to review and comment on the Proposed Project and related CEQA evaluation at this stage in the process. In addition, the NOP is available for review CDFG offices and on CDFG's internet website (http://www.dfg.ca.gov/news/pubnotice/).

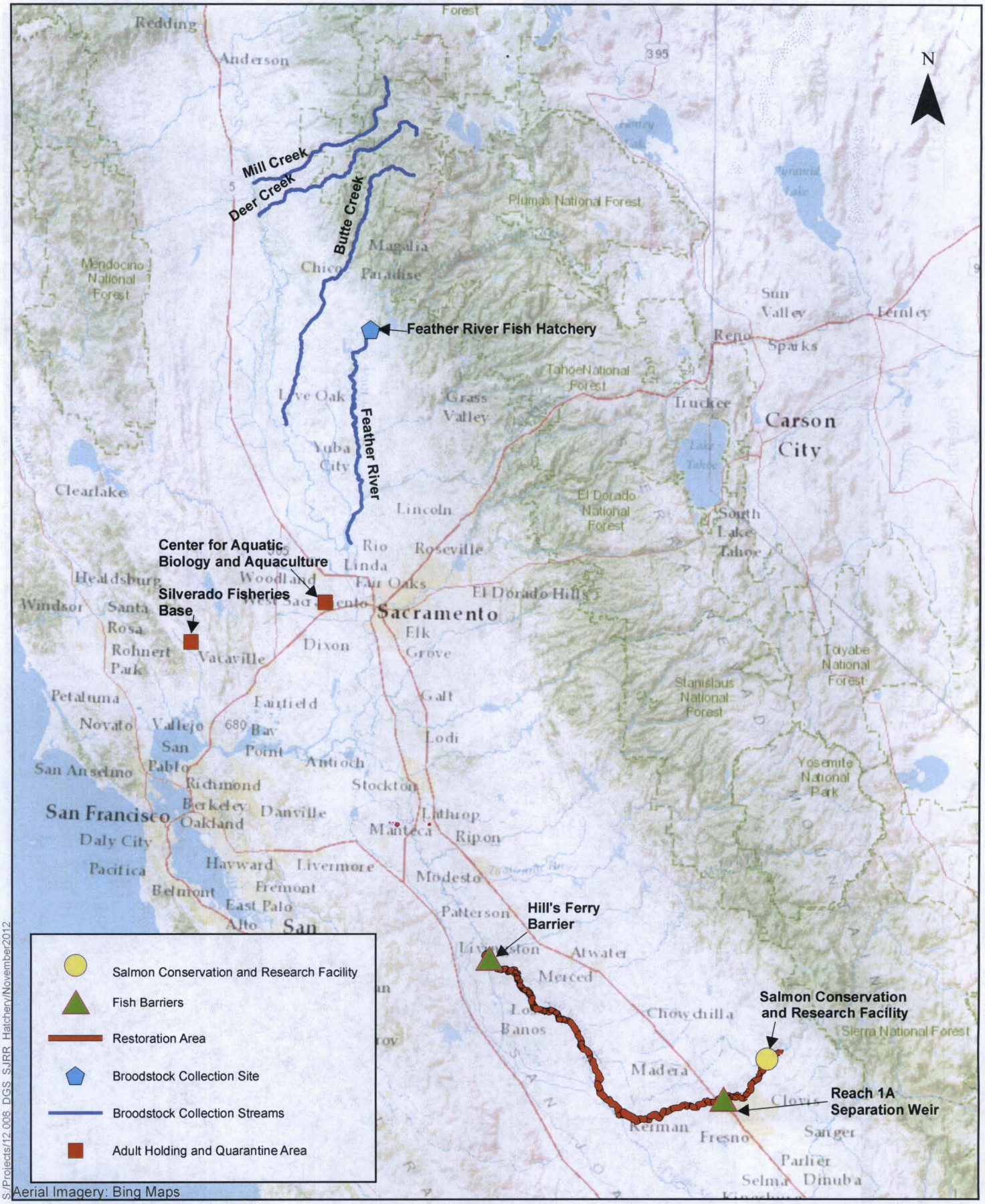
Written comments concerning the scope and content of this EIR are welcome. Consistent with the time prescribed by State law for public review of an NOP, your response to and input regarding the project should be sent at the earliest possible date, but ***not later than 5 pm. on December 26th, 2012***. Please include your name, address, and contact number for

your agency, as applicable, for all future correspondence related to the Proposed Project. Written comments may be sent via email or letter to:

California Department of Fish and Game
Attn: Gerald Hatler
1234 E. Shaw Avenue
Fresno, CA 93710

Email: SCARF@horizonh2o.com
Subject Line: SCARF CEQA Scoping Comments

Alternate formats of this document are available upon request. If reasonable accommodation is needed, call CDFG at (916) 322-8911. The California Relay Service for the deaf or hearing-impaired can be utilized from TDD phones at (800) 735-2929.



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SCARF and Related Management Actions Project
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Figure 1: Project Overview

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Salmon Conservation and Research Facility

Potential Fill Material Borrow Areas

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Figure 2: SCARF Vicinity Map