

# Our View: Upper Yuba deal provides room for everyone to breathe

**Appeal-Democrat Editorial Board | Posted: Sunday, May 10, 2015 12:00 am**

They're pursuing a course of action that addresses a real issue: We want salmon in the upper Yuba River. It's not yet definite; it might not be pretty; something better might come along ... but in the meantime, here you go. And you won't have to wait on an act of Congress.

A coalition of agencies last week announced a framework for a hoped-for settlement agreement that would lead to reintroduction of spring-run salmon through a trap-and-haul system for the Yuba River above New Bullards Bar Reservoir — right where fish passage has been an issue for a couple decades.

Yuba County Water Agency's general manager, Curt Aikens, explained the preliminary agreement. Other parties include the National Marine Fishery Service, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, American Rivers, Trout Unlimited, and California Sportfishing Protection Alliance, according to reporting by the Appeal-Democrat's Andrew Creasey.

What's almost as important as the prospect of getting salmon back into the upper Yuba? The stakeholder groups all agreed this reintroduction plan would mitigate the need to address the issue of fish passage in YCWA's FERC relicensing process. And relicensing is very important to all of Yuba County and the region — it won't have to be held up over a perpetual conundrum over fish passage.

And there's another, more subtle, win in this deal: a fairly diverse group of stakeholders — some of whom haven't always gotten along — came together and put their ideas on the table and all agreed to something. Maybe that can keep happening.

Trap-and-haul systems, to many people's eyes, have always seemed ill-conceived and clumsy. But what alternatives here? A fish passage system could be more costly and, since it would have to be built by the Army Corps of Engineers, would literally take an act of Congress. How's that going for you? Dam breaching? Maybe in some cases on some rivers that could legitimately be considered, but we're talking about Englebright Dam — it's not only a barrier to fish, it's also a beneficial barrier holding back tens of millions of tons of toxic and stream-choking waste and debris from the hydraulic mining era.

The environmental group South Yuba River Citizens League opposes this plan. They maintain that fish passage is essential.

SYRCL is outside the group of stakeholders on this one. The group is solidly in support of reintroduction of salmon and steelhead to upper Yuba River, but against the trucking plan, according

to Caleb Dardick, executive director.

"At an anticipated price tag of \$700 million to construct vast concrete and steel facilities in the river and operate a fleet of fish-hauling trucks and boats, trap and haul is a scientifically uncertain means of restoring wild salmon and unsustainable over the long term."

But it is, at this point, just a framework and would get the job done — and without that act of Congress or release of toxic gunk.

There's still a long way to go, and there's still a big chunk of funding to arrange. An Army Corps of Engineers study will be done in the meantime — maybe some better idea will be identified and the stakeholders can correct course. There's no reason to hold our breath, though. And the idea of a compromise solution that cuts to the chase of reintroducing fish long absent from the upper Yuba gives us breathing room.