

**FISH AND GAME COMMISSION
STATEMENT OF EMERGENCY ACTION
FOR RE-ADOPTION OF EMERGENCY REGULATIONS**

Emergency Action to Re-adopt Section 8.01, Title 14, CCR,
Re: Fisheries at Risk

March 4, 2016

I. Request for Approval of Re-adoption of Emergency Regulations

In response to the continued extreme drought conditions, the Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) is requesting that the Fish and Game Commission (Commission) extend the Department's authority set forth in Section 8.01, Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations, to temporarily close fisheries that are experiencing rapidly degrading environmental conditions within waters of the state. The Department requests that the Commission readopt the emergency regulations that went into effect on July 2, 2015 for an additional period of 90 days while a Certificate of Compliance rulemaking is under consideration.

II. Emergency Regulation in Effect to Date

On January 17, 2014, Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr. proclaimed a State of Emergency to exist in California due to severe drought conditions. As part of the declaration, the Governor ordered the Department to work with the Commission, using the best available science, to determine whether restricting fishing in certain areas would become necessary and prudent as drought conditions persist.

Over the next several months, environmental conditions resulting from the drought requires temporary restrictions on fishing on parts of four rivers to protect fish populations and sustain future opportunity. The Department and the Commission determined that another approach was needed to give the Department more efficient tools to provide quicker response to deteriorating water quality and quantity conditions in California's waters. As a result, on June 11, 2015, the Commission adopted emergency regulations which established a process to temporarily close fisheries experiencing degraded environmental conditions that may affect fish populations or their habitat within waters of the state. The criteria set forth in these regulations are intended to ensure that fisheries are protected under critical conditions stemming from the drought.

Since adoption of the emergency regulations the Department has implemented one emergency fishing closure on state waters, of the lower Merced River, on August 18, 2015. The Department used the criteria established in subsection (b) of Section 8.01 to determine that a closure was warranted.

Following protocol, the Department held a public meeting in Merced prior to the fishing closure. In addition, the Department provided the Commission the biological data used to justify the closure and made the data available to the public on the Department's Emergency Fishing Closure webpage.

The Department and Commission are currently working together to formulate a regular rulemaking proposal that will refine the approach and associated language based on experience and feedback from the public, and with revisions to increase the efficacy of this emergency action.

III. Statement of Emergency

The hydrological conditions in 2015 deteriorated from the record low 2014 conditions. The Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) continues to evaluate and manage the changing impacts of drought on threatened and endangered species and species of special concern, and to develop contingency plans for state Wildlife Areas and Ecological Reserves to manage reduced water resources in the public interest.

Statewide water quality and quantity in many systems is likely to be inadequate to support fisheries until significant and sustained rain and snow accumulate, resulting in impeded passage of spawning fish, increased vulnerability to mortality from predation and physiological stress, and increased angling harvest and/or hooking mortality. Furthermore, survival of eggs and juvenile fish in these systems over the coming months is expected to be extremely low. The historically low water conditions will continue to concentrate coldwater fish populations into shrinking pools of cold water habitat making them easy prey for illegal angling methods such as snagging, increased hooking mortality due to legal catch and release, over-harvest, as well as other human-related disturbances within their freshwater habitat. When coupled with drought-related environmental stressors, such as high water temperature, low dissolved oxygen, and severely reduced suitable habitat, these stressors can seriously affect reproductive success and survival rates.

Since 2014, the Department has worked with the Commission using the best available science, to determine whether restricting fishing in certain areas will become necessary and prudent as drought conditions persist. The Department and Commission have determined that a temporary approach is needed to give the Department effective tools to respond more rapidly to deteriorating water quality and quantity conditions in California's waters for 2015 and early 2016.

V. Re-adoption Criteria

1) Same or Substantially Equivalent

Pursuant to Government Code Section 11346.1(h), the text of a re-adopted regulation must be the "same or substantially equivalent" to the text of the

original emergency regulation. The proposed language for the re-adopted regulatory amendment is the same as the language of the original emergency regulation.

(2) Substantial Progress

Government Code Section 11346.1(h) specifies that the emergency rulemaking agency must demonstrate that it is making “substantial progress and has proceeded with due diligence” to comply with the standard rulemaking provisions. The Commission, at its December 10, 2015 meeting was requested by the Department to authorize staff to file this emergency readopt, as well as file notice of its intent to file a Certificate of Compliance.

Work on the emergency standard has been conducted by DFW biologists to determine longer term impacts which necessitated filing the notice of the Commission's intent to file a Certificate of Compliance in December. Due to the statutory requirement for the Commission to hear the proposed Certificate of Compliance rulemaking at its February 11, 2016 and April 14, 2016 meetings, it is necessary for the Commission to request this first Emergency Readopt for a period of 90-days, followed by a second 90 day request which is proposed to be voted on at the Commission's March 15, 2016 teleconference.