Feather River Subregion

Introduction

This subregion includes all waters of the Feather River from its headwaters in the Sierra Nevada downstream to the Sacramento River confluence. The river is divided into an upper watershed and lower watershed by the 3.5 million-acre-foot Oroville Reservoir, the keystone of the State Water Project.

The Upper Feather Watershed is one of the highest precipitation areas (rainfall and snow) in the state, making it the water supply breadbasket for municipal and agricultural uses in central and southern California. The Middle Fork Feather River is a state-designated Wild and Scenic River, and the North Fork Feather River has been developed extensively for hydropower generation. Construction of Oroville Dam built between 1962-1967 blocked any passage of anadromous species into the upper watershed. A hundred-year legacy of mining, grazing, timber harvest, roads, and railroads (together with fire suppression and, more recently, rural residential development) has affected watershed conditions in both the uplands and the waterways. Public agencies and private organizations in this watershed have been among the state’s leaders in efforts to restore healthy and sustainable watershed conditions.
The Lower Feather River meanders through the lush valley agricultural lands and joins the Sacramento River at Verona north of the city of Sacramento. The landscape is dominated by orchards, rice, and other irrigated row crops. Yuba City and Marysville are rapidly expanding major urban centers in this watershed area. The Lower Feather River is confined by a system of levees, and flooding and flood management are longstanding management issues for this reach of the river. Other important management issues are protection and improvement of habitat conditions—aquatic habitat conditions required for propagation of salmon and steelhead that migrate through the Lower Feather River, and riparian habitat along the river corridor that supports a variety of important wildlife species. The Lower Feather River is 303(d) listed as water quality-impaired from mercury, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), and agricultural chemicals. Water flow to meet the requirements of both anadromous fish and irrigated agriculture is also a management concern.