

Restoration Administrator Flow Recommendation

To: Don Portz, Chad Moore, Regina Bricka
CC: Rain Emerson, Rufino Gonzalez, Gary Bobker, Steve Ottemoeller, Ian Buck-Macleod, TAC, FWC
Date: March 25, 2026
From: Tom Johnson, Restoration Administrator
Subject: Revised March Recommendation for 2026 Restoration Flows

The following is a revised March Restoration Flow Recommendation (Recommendation) by the Restoration Administrator (RA) for the 2026 Restoration Year Flows pursuant to the Restoration Flow Guidelines (RFG) Ver. 2.1, as amended, and Exhibit B of the Settlement. This Recommendation is issued in response to the Allocation dated March 16, 2026.

Background

The SJRRP has issued an Updated 2026 Restoration Allocation (Allocation) dated March 16, 2026, which designates 2026 as a **Normal-Dry** Water Year Type with an Unimpaired Inflow hybrid forecast of 1,397 thousand acre-feet (TAF) and provides an allocation of Restoration Flows of 276.220 TAF as measured at Gravelly Ford (GRF) based on the blended 75% exceedance forecast. The Allocation also specified certain contractual and operational constraints on Restoration Flow releases for 2026.

From October 2025 to present, the Upper San Joaquin watershed has experienced near average precipitation. However, the distribution of the precipitation and runoff (both observed and expected) has been atypical due to two primary factors: 1) most of the precipitation so far this year has fallen during warm storms with high freezing elevations, and 2) March 2026 is forecast to be among the driest and warmest on record. The result is that while precipitation is near-normal, runoff has been above normal and snowpack has been below normal.

From February 11-19, a series of colder storms substantially increased the snowpack volume. These storms added to the modest snowpack at higher elevations and brought the first snow to the lower elevations. These February storms increased snowpack at elevations below 8,000' substantially. However, dry conditions resumed as of early March, and generally dry conditions are forecast through April. Peak snow water equivalent (SWE) volume peaked at about 1,000 TAF on February 20 and is unlikely to rebound above that value shy of an extremely wet spring. Since that date, snowpack has declined, whereas historically snowpack would be expected to continue growing throughout March. In the absence of substantial additional precipitation, it is anticipated that the next Allocation may decrease.

In addition to hydrology, several operational constraints in Reach 3 have required flow adjustments. A heavy concentration of water hyacinth needed to be moved from the lower end of Reach 3 to allow flows to pass Sack Dam at the recommended levels, and additional construction operations will need to be accommodated in mid-May. Finally, in consultation with Implementing Agency biologists, it was determined to hold flows through Reach 4A at specific levels to balance adult spring-run Chinook Salmon attraction flows with the ability to observe and capture returning adults.

I have consulted with the TAC and the FMWG on this Recommendation, and this Recommendation reflects the best use of the Allocation of Restoration Flows for the aquatic resources at this time.

Recommendation for the 2026 Restoration Year

At this time, I am recommending a flow schedule for the 2026 Restoration Year as shown in Table 1, and as follows:

1. Maintain flows as high as possible in March to facilitate outmigration and clear residual aquatic vegetation (water hyacinth) in Reach 3 and 4.
2. Ramp flows down beginning in late March to balance adult spring-run Chinook Salmon attraction, Millerton Lake cold pool preservation, and ability to capture adults below Sack Dam.
3. Maintain a connected river through June – October using spring flexible flows shifted into the summer baseflow period.
4. No exchanges or buffer flows are called upon at this time.
5. 11.0314 TAF Gross, 10.479 TAF Net URF’s were released on March 19th. No Additional URF’s are released yet pending the next Flow Allocation and demonstration that future Allocations will not substantially decrease.
6. No Restoration Flow recapture other than de-minimus amounts are planned in the Restoration Area. All Restoration Flow releases are to flow through the entirety of the Restoration Area.

This Recommendation is intended to a) release the maximum possible volume of Restoration Flows down the SJR, b) provide sufficient flows in Reaches 4 and 5 for adult spring-run Chinook Salmon migration and trapping, c) allow for adult salmon trapping and monitoring downstream of Sack Dam, and d) provide a connected SJR through all reaches while minimizing impacts to Millerton Lake cold water pool. However, given the early season uncertainty as to Restoration Year hydrology, I anticipate additional adjustments to this Recommendation in the coming months.

If there are operational or other constraints that preclude Restoration Flows traveling the entire length of the Restoration Area, the Restoration Recommendation will be adjusted to reduce Restoration Flow releases to the level of the controlling operational constraint.

Table 1. Summary of Restoration Flow Recommendations for March 1, 2026, through February 28, 2027.

Restoration Flow Period	Date Range	Objective	Friant Release (est., varies due to Holding Contracts)	Restoration Flows at Gravelly Ford	Total Flow at Gravelly Ford¹	Target Restoration Flow at Sack Dam (est.)
	March 16 – March 27, 2026	Maximum Reach 3 flows	As necessary up to 1,000 cfs	Up to 850 cfs	Up to 855 cfs	Up to 665 cfs
2026 Spring Flex. Flow Period	<i>Seek to achieve flows as possible at near maximum Reach 3 seepage limits Mar 16 – March 27, without substantial recapture. Adjust as needed for operational situation in Reach 3. Coordination with Restoration Administrator as necessary to adjust flows.</i>					

Restoration Flow Period	Date Range	Objective	Friant Release (est., varies due to Holding Contracts)	Restoration Flows at Gravelly Ford	Total Flow at Gravelly Ford¹	Target Restoration Flow at Sack Dam (est.)
	March 28 – April 4, 2026	Ramp down	As necessary, est. 950 - 750 cfs	580 cfs by April 4	585 cfs by April 4	685 to 480 cfs
	April 5 – May 14, 2026	Hold flow to promote adult migration	As necessary, estimated at 695 cfs	Approx. 580 cfs	585 cfs	450 - 480 cfs
	<i>Commencing March 28, ramp down to achieve a Restoration Flow target flow of 580 cfs at GRF by April 4. Adjust flows to achieve maximum flow possible at Sack Dam with 1 row of boards pulled, estimated to be 450 – 480 cfs, then hold through May 14</i>					
	May 15 – May 28, 2026	Ramp Down and hold	As necessary, est. 800 - 510 cfs	As occurs	As occurs	200 cfs from May 15 th onwards
	<i>Drop flows at Sack Dam to 200 cfs on May 15th, by using recapture. Starting no earlier than May 15th, reduce flows from Friant Dam to achieve the target Restoration Flow of about 300 cfs of Restoration Flows at GRF as soon as possible thereafter, to be able to hold flows at 200 cfs at Sack Dam with no recapture.</i>					
Summer Connectivity	May 29 – June 10, 2026	Summer connectivity	As necessary, est. 465 cfs	250 cfs	255 cfs	125 cfs
	June 11 – September 30, 2026	Summer connectivity	As necessary, est. 375 cfs	160 cfs	165 cfs	70 cfs
	<i>Reduce flows to achieve 250 cfs of Restoration Flows at GRF by May 29. Further reduce flows to achieve 160 cfs of Restoration Flows at GRF by June 11.</i>					
Base Flow	October 1 – October 31, 2026	Reconnect Reach 4 & 5, spring run spawning and egg incubation	As necessary, est. 400 cfs	190 cfs	195 cfs	100 cfs
	November 1 – November 30, 2026	Connected river, spring run egg incubation,	As necessary, est. 420 cfs	230 cfs	235 cfs	135 cfs
Fall Pulse	December 1 – December 31, 2026	Connected river, juvenile rearing	As necessary, est. 440 cfs	320 cfs	325 cfs	220 cfs
Base Flows	January 1 – February 28, 2027	Connected river, juvenile rearing	As necessary, est. 400 – 410 cfs	250 cfs	255 cfs	160 cfs

¹Total Flow includes the minimum Holding Contract flows of 5 cfs required at Gravelly Ford

Additional Elements of this Recommendation

This Recommendation anticipates the release of approximately 215 to 220 TAF of Restoration Flows to the river.

Depending on changing hydrologic conditions, I will adjust or revise this recommendation as necessary.

Additional Consultation

I will continue to coordinate with the TAC, Program Office, and Implementing Agencies to monitor hydrologic conditions, fish population conditions, uncontrolled season releases, operational conditions, and other factors, and will update the Restoration Flow Recommendation as conditions change.

Table 1. Estimate of Released Restoration Flows

Summary Volumes				
GRAVELLY FORD FLOWS AVAILABLE VERSUS RA RECOMMENDATION				
		Available	Used	Balance
Total GRF River Flow Target without 5 cfs (March 1, 2025 - Feb 28, 2026):		276.220 TAF	218.767 TAF	57.453 TAF
Restoration Allocation Flow		276.220 TAF	218.767 TAF	57.453 TAF
Exchange Flow		0.000 TAF	0.000 TAF	0.000 TAF
Buffer Flows		0.000 TAF	0.000 TAF	0.000 TAF
		URF's Disposed of as of 3/25/2026		11.031
	Use Buffer Flows? no		Net Alloc Remainder	46.422 TAF

