

Memorandum

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
California Department of Water Resources

Date:

To: Requestors of cultured Delta Smelt originating from the University of California Davis Fish Conservation & Culture Laboratory from the 2026 year-class

From: Culture and Supplementation of Smelt Steering Committee

Subject: Annual process to request Delta Smelt from the University of California Davis Fish Conservation & Culture Laboratory from the 2026 year-class

This memorandum provides information on how to request cultured Delta Smelt from the 2026 year-class, including an updated request form (see attached) and information on criteria that will be used to evaluate proposals received.

Please note, this is the only solicitation for proposals for 2026 brood year fish and 2025 brood-year post-spawn adult fish if available. **Late juvenile (> 120 dph) and pre-spawn adult fish are prioritized for supplementation and are not available.** To inquire about the availability of post-spawn excess Delta Smelt, contact (Katherine Sun, Katherine_Sun@fws.gov). Requests for 2026 brood year fish and 2025 post spawn excess must be submitted to Nora De Cuir (Kearns & West) at ndecuir@kearnswest.com on or before **October 10, 2025**. Based on Supplementation Program needs and the production schedule, early life stages of fish may be available as follows.

| <u>Life stage</u> | <u>Availability*</u> |
|---------------------------|----------------------|
| Embryo | January - June |
| Larval (<40 dph) | March - July |
| Early juvenile (~120 dph) | May - August |

* actual dates of availability dependent on production schedule

The primary intent of this process is to make cultured Delta Smelt available for research, based on availability. When fish are limited, requests will be prioritized based on the degree to which the proposed research directly addresses supplementation management needs as outlined below. Requests for other uses of cultured Delta Smelt, such as education, will be considered but are a lower priority and will only be approved if fish are available after all other priority needs are met.

When submitting a fish request proposal, please follow the template below (see pages 5-7). Only proposals that follow the provided template will be evaluated by the Culture and Supplementation of Smelt Steering Committee and working groups.

What is the CASS?

Supplementation of the delta smelt population with fish raised in captivity is a mitigation measure proposed by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) and the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) through the Endangered Species Act §7(a)(2) consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on the Coordinated Operations of the Central Valley Project and State Water Project (USFWS 2019; 2024). In October 2019, USFWS, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), Reclamation, and DWR established the Culture and Supplementation of Smelt (CASS) Steering Committee (SC); a charter is available upon request. The purpose of the CASS SC is to implement science-based activities to secure and stabilize the wild Delta Smelt population through a coordinated propagation and supplementation program. To facilitate cooperative and consensus-driven recommendations to agencies, the CASS SC receives technical guidance from working groups (WG) concerning: (1) Captive Propagation (CPWG), (2) Research (RWG), and (3) Regulation Coordination (RCWG).

The CASS SC identified an early need for improved documentation and prioritization of the usage of cultured Delta Smelt propagated at the University of California Davis Fish Conservation & Culture Laboratory (FCCL) for optimal information gain and high management relevance. To this end, the CASS SC has established a process for soliciting, evaluating, and approving requests of cultured Delta Smelt from the 2026 year-class. Before undertaking a study that incorporates cultured Delta Smelt, requestors must submit a Cultured Delta Smelt 2026 year- class Fish Request Proposal (see page 5) and any additional documentation.

Please note the CASS is not a regulatory entity and does not issue state and federal permits. Investigators are responsible for pursuing regulatory permits separately and those will need to be in place before fish can be provided. Permits required may include CDFW scientific collection permits for California Endangered Species Act listed species and associated memorandums of understanding (MOU), and USFWS ESA 10(a)1(A) recovery permits. For more information regarding state regulatory requirements, please contact Stephanie Fong at Stephanie.Fong@Wildlife.ca.gov. For more information regarding federal regulatory requirements, please contact Dama Valle at damayanti_valle@fws.gov.

Proposal evaluation by the CASS

Beginning in the fall of 2024, FWS began implementation of an adaptively managed Delta Smelt Supplementation Program that will continue to release fish on an annual cycle. To ensure that cultured Delta Smelt can be used to maximal information and conservation management gain, the CASS has developed a list of priority study categories based upon the USFWS Delta Smelt Supplementation Strategy (please contact Katherine Sun (katherine_sun@fws.gov) with specific questions) as well as the Delta Smelt hatchery and genetic management information (please contact Dr. Tien-Chieh Hung (thung@ucdavis.edu) and cc Dr. Nann Fangue (nafangue@ucdavis.edu) with specific questions). These categories are:

1. Experimental Release and Supplementation Implementation Practices
2. Hatchery Practice Improvements
3. Studies to Inform Management Decisions

4. Mechanistic Understanding and Monitoring of Survival and Growth
 - a. Genetic
 - b. Habitat
 - c. Pathogen
 - d. Entrainment
5. Fundamental Biology and Physiology

Proposals requesting the use of cultured Delta Smelt will be evaluated based upon whether they address one or more of the above management priorities and evaluated based on:

- Urgency of the Information Need
- Quality of the Fish Request Proposal
- Study Objectives and Methods
- Communication Plan (required)

If the proposal involves co-project investigators or collaborators, please ensure that these investigators have reviewed the proposal and are familiar with the proposal requirements and evaluation criteria.

Proposals will be reviewed and prioritized by the CPWG, RWG, and RCWG, and each working group will provide prioritized recommendations as to whether to approve or deny the request to the SC. All proposals should follow the format outlined in the template below (pages 5-7). Proposals that do not follow the formatting may not be reviewed. Requestors may be contacted by the working groups with minor questions or concerns about the request. Requesters will receive notification of fish allocation decisions by December 30, 2025. Requests for post-spawn adult Delta Smelt may not receive a decision until a later date.

Courtesy Review

If a letter of support from the CASS is required for investigators to apply for funding, a Fish Request Proposal (see pages 4-6) should be submitted three months in advance of the funding solicitation due date for a courtesy review. The CASS will return written documentation (an email) of the recommendation after the proposal has been reviewed for hatchery feasibility, scientific merit, and permissibility by the CPWG, RWG, and RCWG chairs, respectively, and the SC has been updated. The courtesy review is a red flag review only and does not preclude the submission of the Fish Request Proposal for fish allocation, nor does it guarantee approval of a fish request; a Fish Request Proposal must still be submitted before the annual CASS deadline.

Multi-year Proposals

The CASS solicits Fish Request Proposals on an annual basis to enable efficient hatchery management at the FCCL and to allow adequate time for communication among agencies about supplementation priorities. However, to prevent investigators from having to submit proposals for the same study across years, a Fish Request Proposal for a multi-year study can be submitted during the annual solicitation cycle. If a multi-year study is desired, investigators should provide a justification as part of the Fish Request Proposal (see section h) that details why the study must span multiple years. This option shall not be used as a means to subvert the annual solicitation cycle and even when desired, the multi-year aspect of the study may not be approved or only partially approved. Please note, as with any fish request, provision of cultured Delta Smelt in

future years cannot be guaranteed and is subject to the prioritization of refugial population, supplementation, and other priorities of the agencies.

If a multi-year study is approved, the investigators should submit a short description of the fish needed (sections f.1 and f.2) in years after the first year to Dr. Nann Fangue (nafangue@ucdavis.edu) and Nora De Cuir (ndecuir@kearnswest.com) on or before the annual proposal deadline (**September 30, annually**).

Out-of-cycle Proposals

The submission of out-of-cycle (OOC) proposals should be avoided as the CASS cannot guarantee timely evaluation and the return of a decision and fish are unlikely to be available. If an OOC proposal is required, the requestor should contact Nora De Cuir (ndecuir@kearnswest.com) to discuss fish availability.

CULTURED DELTA SMELT FISH REQUEST PROPOSAL TEMPLATE

Describe the proposed study by filling in the following sections (expected length is approximately 3-5 pages). All elements are required. However, if the proposal is for non-research activities such as education, it is not necessary to reply to items f3, f4, h, i, or j.

- a. Title of the Fish Request Proposal
- b. Contact information including: Names, email addresses, and phone numbers of the Project Investigator and all Co-Investigators
- c. Project need (why)
- d. Objectives (what)
- e. Methods (how)
 1. Describe the fish needed (minimum and maximum) for the proposed study;
 - i. Life stage (eggs, larvae, early juvenile, post-spawn adult)
 - ii. Number
 - A table that breaks down the number of fish per life-stage needed in alignment with all components of the study plan
 - iii. Sex (if applicable)
 - iv. Other (e.g., desired number of families)
 - v. Date needed
 2. Describe the study location (if applicable)
 3. Describe the study design
 4. Describe the experimental techniques and equipment
 5. Describe the planned disposition of fish specimens upon completion of the study
- f. Study timeline
- g. Justification for a new multi-year study, if desired (suggested length is one paragraph)
 1. Describe why the study must span multiple years.
- h. Anticipated results
- i. Redundancy
 1. Describe how the project will answer questions not answered by earlier research
 2. Explain how the proposed project will be coordinated with past and ongoing research studies
- j. Funding
 1. Identify contracts and agreements held for the proposed study (attach copy or

give title, funding organization name and address, date of signature, and duration of contract)

2. State whether full funding will be available for the completion of the proposed activity

k. Student Support

1. State whether the study will be done for a student project, the name and school affiliation of the student, and the nature of the work (i.e., senior thesis, master's thesis, Ph.D. dissertation, or postdoctoral project)

l. Permitting

1. Has this study been authorized under (1) a USFWS 10(a)1(A) recovery permit, and (2) a CDFW MOU? YES ___NO ___
2. If yes, provide permit numbers.
3. If no, have you submitted a permit application to USFWS and CDFW? YES ___ NO _____. Date _____ FWS ___ CDFW ___
4. Would a change/addition in the List of Authorized individuals under (1) a USFWS 10(a)1(A) recovery permit be needed? YES ___NO ___

m. Communication Plan (required)

1. To assist with adaptive management decision making, the communication plan should include regular and timely contact with management agencies; describe how study results will be communicated to management agencies

(e.g., emails, meetings, phone calls, presentations, reports, publications) and approximate time frame.

2. A one paragraph abstract on study progress (or final reports or publications) should be submitted to the CASS twice yearly on March 31 and September 30, provided fish have been received. Reports should be emailed to Nora De Cuir (ndcuir@kearnswest.com).
3. Describe how study results will be disseminated to the public and interested parties (e.g., presentations, reports, publications) and approximate time frame for when dissemination will happen.
4. Describe whether and how study data will be made publicly accessible.

n. Literature Cited