

FEDERAL ENERGY REGULATORY COMMISSION
WASHINGTON D.C. 20426

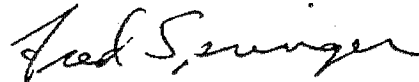
Project No. P-2079-012

April 27, 1992

Mr. Edward Horton
Placer County Water Agency
185 Ferguson Road
P. O. Box 6570
Auburn, CA 95604

Gentlemen:

Enclosed is the order designated Amendment No. 1 , Instrument
No. 2 , in the above-entitled matter.



Fred E. Springer
Director, Office of
Hydropower Licensing

0349

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
FEDERAL ENERGY REGULATORY COMMISSION

Placer County Water Agency

Project No. 2079-012
California

ORDER APPROVING REVISED RECREATION PLAN
WITH MODIFICATION AND AMENDING LICENSE

On February 28, 1989, the Placer County Water Agency (licensee) filed a revised recreation plan for the Middle Fork American River Project. The plan was to correct deficiencies in the existing recreation plan observed during an August 7, 1987, environmental and public use inspection conducted by the Commission's San Francisco Regional Office (SFRO). The level of recreation use envisioned in the original recreation plan has not been realized; however, the existing facilities¹ are in need of rehabilitation. The licensee proposes to upgrade the existing facilities, to make certain facilities more accessible to the disabled, and provide numerous additional facilities and enhancements to campgrounds, parking lots and other specified facilities. The licensee also proposes to amend the plan by excluding several areas proposed for future development from the plan.

The U.S. Forest Service (FS) provided comments by letters dated February 14, April 24, May 1, 1989, October 9, 1991 and March 13, 1992. The FS is concerned that certain areas not be excluded from the approved recreation plan, and that adequate provisions be made for future recreation development. The FS also made site-specific recommendations regarding certain facilities. By letter issued August 8, 1991, the Commission staff requested additional information from the FS concerning these issues and any other items of concern in the plan. The FS's October 9, 1991, letter responded regarding the need for a water treatment system to supply the recreation facilities. The March 13, 1992 letter provided clarification concerning a spectrum of issues.

¹ The licensee's most recent FERC Form 80 data indicates that the current project recreation facilities consist generally of the following: Ralston Afterbay: 1 boat launch, and 1 picnic and access area; French Meadows: 2 boat launches 2 picnic areas, 5 campgrounds with 115 campsites, 7 group camps and 1 visitor center; Duncan Creek: 6 campsites; Hell Hole: 1 boat launch, 1 trail, 2 camping areas, and 1 visitor center.

9204300434

014

Proposed Exclusion of Recreation Areas from the Approved Plan

The licensee's plan proposes to exclude recreation areas outside the project boundary that were identified in the plan as not being project related. The FS had strenuous objections to this aspect of the plan. The FS felt that project-related recreation use of the Arhart, Middle and Big Meadows Campgrounds did occur and recommended that these areas be retained in the plan.

In addition, the National Park Service in its April 7, 1988, comment letter recommended that toilets not be provided near the Duncan Creek Reservoir; increased recreational activity could adversely affect riparian habitat and cultural resources.

Because direct recreational access to the project is limited by the topography of the project impoundment, project-induced recreation use at the subject campgrounds is likely to occur. Therefore, the revised plan should be modified to retain the campgrounds as part of the approved recreation plan. Further, insufficient need has been identified to require development of the Duncan Creek site, and sensitive environmental resources exist in the area may be adversely impacted by additional recreational development. As such, continued consideration of the Duncan Creek site for future recreational development is unwarranted and it should not be approved in the plan.

Future Recreational Development

The revised plan identifies proposed project recreational development for the remaining license period (until 2013). The licensee has included triggering mechanisms in the plan to identify when future recreational development should be provided.² The development may consist of an additional group camp³ and/or a 30-unit campground. If certain "triggering mechanisms" contained in the plan are activated, the licensee agrees to construct these new facilities. The FS is opposed to the plan's triggering mechanisms regarding group camps but agrees with the licensee's triggering provisions regarding other construction.

² The licensee's proposed triggering mechanism for group camps requires that six of seven group camps be reserved to at least 75% capacity 14 weekend days per summer (Memorial Day to Labor Day), excluding the Memorial, Labor Day and Fourth of July weekends. Excluding the major holidays, 11 summer weekends (or 22 weekend days) remain.

³ Group camps are camping areas set aside for large groups of people who wish to camp together, rather than at single family campsites.

Problems exist with the triggering mechanism scheme for group camps so the scheme should not be relied upon as the sole means of determining the recreational needs of the project. The licensee's triggering mechanism puts too much emphasis on the separate group camps being used to capacity. The group camps will presumably be occupied by one group at a time. Occupancy by any size group will fully utilize a given group camp regardless of the number of campers at the site. Thus, the licensee's triggering mechanism, requiring a site to be reserved to 75 per cent of capacity, would tend to underestimate the use of the camps. As such, the size of the group should not be considered in determining the need for new facilities. In addition, the mechanisms will not take into account the potential for changing public preference in recreation activities (if group camps fall out of favor) over the course of time.

Although the licensee's proposed triggering mechanism does not completely answer the questions of when and what recreational development is warranted, it is an indication of possible need and should be retained in the plan. If the need for new development is triggered, the licensee should file an application to amend its recreation plan to allow the Commission to evaluate the effects of the licensee's development proposals.⁶ However, the Commission will not rely on the triggering mechanisms as the sole means to determine when additional recreation development is necessary.

Commission Order 313, in setting out the Commission's policy regarding recreational development, states:

"We...intend in connection with any application for substantial amendment to a license, reasonably related to recreation, which does not presently incorporate an article requiring the filing of a recreation use plan, the standard free access article, or the article providing for the installation of such recreation facilities as the Commission might...find...required by the public interest, to require the licensee to show cause why such articles should not be incorporated into its license, if the license is otherwise amended in response to the application".

The existing license does not contain a provision for the installation of recreation facilities after notice and opportunity for a hearing identified in order 313. In order to assure that the license contains adequate flexibility to address possible future recreation development needs, this order will

⁶ The specific facilities provided (such as vault toilets v. flush type toilets) will be determined at such time as the actual site plans for development are approved.

amend the project license to include article 46, contained in ordering paragraph G. Inclusion of article 46 into the project license will allow for changes in recreational development based on need, and will supplement the triggering mechanisms which may not reflect totally the future recreational needs of the project. In addition, the article will permit additional review of recreational facilities needs, and allow for such additional recreational development as demonstrated to be necessary.

Recommendations Regarding Specific Facilities

The FS also comments that the configuration and number of camping and parking spurs (pads) proposed is inadequate to meet recreational needs.⁵ The FS asserts that the number, location, and configuration of the spurs should be determined by the specific topography of each area.

It appears that the licensee's proposal is a reasonable attempt to meet the project's recreational needs; however, additional improvements could be made. In addition, the FS states that cultural resources have been identified in the Big Meadows Campground which may affect installation or modification of that campground. FS assistance in the layout of the spurs should be helpful to the licensee in determining the exact location of the pads and avoiding unnecessary destruction of natural and cultural resources. As such, the licensee should consult with the FS and the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) prior to developing site-specific plans for installation of the spurs. The site plans, along with documentation of agency consultation on the plan, should be filed for Commission approval.

By letter filed October 9, 1991, the FS commented that the Environmental Protection Agency's surface water treatment rules would apply to the campground water systems at the French Meadows Reservoir, and unless an approved water treatment system was in place by June 29, 1993, the State of California would require closure of the campground facilities. The FS recommended that the licensee's plan be modified to include a requirement that the licensee "...identify the appropriate facilities needed to treat the water systems and incorporate that information into the plan in an expedient manner..."

⁵ The FS design standard for camping spurs is 55 feet in length. The 45 foot length proposed by the licensee should be acceptable because of the topography of the area. The FS states the licensee's proposal will not provide enough lengthened sites to provide for the demand for RV sites originating from the San Francisco metropolitan area. The FS proposes that 35 spurs be lengthened at French Meadows, 15-20 sites at Lewis Family Campground, and 20 spurs at Big Meadows.

The existing recreation facilities at French Meadows Reservoir use a surface water system to provide potable water. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and State of California water treatment standards will require approved treatment systems for the water supply to the campgrounds. Because a potable water supply is a part of the existing recreation facilities, the licensee is responsible for ensuring that adequate water treatment systems are installed and public use of the campground continues. It is not necessary for the licensee to include details of how it expects to meet this required standard in this recreation plan.

Regarding the FS initial recommendation that the licensee be required to provide additional sanitary facilities at the Ralston Afterbay, the FS in its March 13, 1992 letter states that commercial rafting interests have arranged to provide sanitary facilities. The FS letter indicates that the facilities are sufficient for the present time. As such, the licensee's plan should not be modified to require construction of the additional sanitary facilities.

Schedule

The licensee proposes completion of certain recreation facilities (pages 19 through 22) by October 31, 1993. This schedule should be modified to permit the licensee additional time to design and construct the recreation facilities including the modifications to the plan contained in this order. The schedule should be revised to require completion of the facilities, not later than October 31, 1995.⁶

Conclusion

The licensee's proposal, as modified by the ordering paragraphs, will ensure adequate recreational access to the project and should be approved. The environmental impacts of the licensee's proposal should be minor, of short duration, and similar to those associated with constructing the existing recreational facilities.

The Director orders:

(A) The licensee's revised recreation plan filed February 28, 1989, is approved as modified by the following ordering paragraphs.

⁶ Except for the campground water systems which must be in place by the deadlines specified by the appropriate state and federal agencies.

(B) The Arhart, Middle Meadows and Big Meadows Campgrounds shall remain approved recreation facilities within the revised recreation plan. Future development of the Duncan Creek reservoir site is not required by this order.


(C) The licensee shall complete the ordered recreation facilities not later than October 31, 1996. Within 90 days of completing the improvements to the project recreation facilities, the licensee shall file as-built drawings of the facilities as constructed.

(D) The licensee shall consult with the FS and SHPO prior to installation of the spurs and on the location and configuration of the spurs. Site plan drawings and documentation of agency consultation should be filed for Commission approval at least 180 days prior to construction of those facilities.

(E) The license is amended to include the following article:

Article 46. The licensee shall construct, maintain, and operate or shall arrange for the construction, maintenance and operation of such reasonable recreational facilities, including wharves, launching ramps, beaches, picnic and camping areas, sanitary facilities, and utilities, giving consideration to the needs of the physically handicapped, and shall comply with such reasonable modifications of the project, as may be prescribed hereafter by the Commission during the term of the license upon its own motion or upon the recommendation of the Secretary of the Interior or other interested Federal or State agencies, after notice and opportunity for a hearing.

(F) This order constitutes final agency action. Requests for rehearing by the Commission may be filed within 30 days of the date of issuance of this order, pursuant to 18 C.F.R. § 385.713.


J. Mark Robinson
Director, Division of Project
Compliance and Administration