

**NOTICE OF SCOPING FOR ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS UNDER  
CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT  
FOR RELICENSING OF THE  
MIDDLE FORK AMERICAN RIVER PROJECT**

**March 4, 2008**

9:00 – 11:30 am

6:30 – 9:00 pm

**Auburn Recreation District -Canyon View Community Center  
471 Maidu Drive  
Auburn, California**

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**TO: All Interested Parties**

Placer County Water Agency (PCWA), a California public agency, owns the Middle Fork American River Project (MFP), a hydroelectric project licensed by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC Project No. 2079). The current license will expire on March 1, 2013. On December 13, 2007 PCWA submitted to FERC a notice of intent to file an Application for New License and a Pre-Application Document.

In order for PCWA to apply for and accept a new license from FERC and implement new license conditions, including potential construction of required or allowed facilities, the License Application must be supported by an environmental analysis that complies with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) must also issue a Clean Water Act § 401 Water Quality Certification (“401 Certification”) before a new license can be issued by FERC, and this certification must also be supported by CEQA environmental analysis.

PCWA is the lead agency for compliance with CEQA and preparation of the required environmental analysis; the SWRCB will be a responsible agency.

In collaboration with Federal and State agencies, Native American tribal governments and non-governmental organizations, PCWA has developed 28 technical study plans covering five resource areas. Information developed in these studies that is pertinent to PCWA’s proposed action under CEQA will be included in PCWA’s environmental analysis. FERC will concurrently conduct its environmental review of the MFP license application under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Under CEQA, “scoping” is the process used to identify issues related to relicensing the MFP that should be considered in the CEQA environmental analysis. PCWA is requesting information during this scoping process to identify relevant issues that could be used to guide the CEQA process.

To provide an opportunity for interested parties to provide input, **two public Scoping Sessions will be conducted:**

**Tuesday, March 4, 2008**

**9:00 – 11:30 am**

**and**

**6:30 – 9:00 pm**

**Auburn Recreation District -Canyon View Community Center  
471 Maidu Drive  
Auburn, California**

A description of the MFP will be provided during the public scoping meeting using maps, photographs and video. PCWA will accept written comments on the proposed scope and content of the CEQA environmental analysis for thirty (30) days beginning on March 4, 2008. Please send your comments by the close of business day April 2, 2008 to:

Mal Toy, Director of Resource Development  
Placer County Water Agency  
Post Office Box 6570  
Auburn, CA 95604  
relicensing@pcwa.net

## **PROJECT OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND**

The MFP serves as a multi-purpose water supply and hydroelectric generation project designed to beneficially utilize waters of the Middle Fork American River, the Rubicon River, and several associated tributary streams. The MFP is located on the west slope of the Sierra Nevada primarily in Placer County, within the Middle Fork American River Watershed (Watershed) at elevations ranging from approximately 1,100 feet to 5,300 feet. The MFP, which began operation in 1967, includes two major storage reservoirs (French Meadows and Hell Hole, that have a combined capacity of approximately 342,000 AF), five smaller regulating reservoirs and diversion pools, and five powerhouses (combined capacity of approximately 224 MW). Water for hydroelectric generation and consumptive use is diverted and stored under permits and licenses issued by the SWRCB. The MFP seasonally stores and releases water to meet consumptive water needs within western Placer County and to generate power for the California electrical grid.

## **SUMMARY OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT**

The Project to be analyzed under CEQA is PCWA's discretionary authority to apply for and accept a new license and implement any project changes and measures for protection, mitigation or enhancement of environmental and cultural resources included in the new license. The protection, mitigation and enhancement measures will have been developed in collaboration with federal and state resource agencies, Native American tribes, local governments, non-governmental organizations and members of the public during the relicensing process.

As part of its application for a new license PCWA may propose additions or changes to the MFP. They include efficiency upgrades at the Ralston and French Meadows powerhouses; installation of operable gates on Hell Hole Reservoir spillway and revisions to the South Fork Long Canyon Diversion to increase Hell Hole Reservoir seasonal storage capacity; and the addition of a second powerhouse and penstock at the location of the French Meadows Powerhouse to increase MFP generating capacity.

## **POSSIBLE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS**

Changes in project facilities and operations may result in changes in the existing environmental effects of the MFP. Changes in flow regimes as a result of new license conditions have the potential to affect geomorphic processes, water quality, and aquatic and riparian habitat in the river reaches downstream of MFP facilities. These flow-related physical changes may result in direct or indirect impacts to aquatic species (i.e., fish, amphibians, reptiles, macroinvertebrates, and mollusks) or riparian vegetation along the stream margins. Stream-based recreation opportunities (i.e., whitewater boating, angling, swimming, and mining) and user satisfaction may also be impacted. Changes in flow regimes may also affect trail users (i.e., equestrians and hikers) at river crossings.

Storage fluctuations and related changes in water surface elevations in MFP reservoirs have the potential to affect the duration of shoreline inundation, rates of shoreline erosion, water quality and temperature, and aquatic and riparian habitat. These changes may result in direct or indirect impacts to aquatic and terrestrial species, special status plant and wildlife species and cultural resources (i.e., prehistoric archaeological sites and artifacts) along the shoreline and at tributary confluences. Seasonal changes in water surface elevation/storage may also affect reservoir recreation opportunities including boating, angling, and swimming and user satisfaction.

Changes in routine maintenance of MFP facilities may also affect environmental resources. Potential impacts may include disturbance or displacement of special-status plants and wildlife or their habitats, introduction or spread of noxious weeds, and loss or damage of prehistoric and historic archeological sites and artifacts.

Routine removal of sediment and large woody debris at MFP reservoirs and diversion pools may also result in resource impacts. Potential impacts include reduction in the downstream supply of sediment and large woody debris to maintain aquatic habitats, and disturbance of special-status wildlife and aquatic species, and their habitats. Restrictions of area road use and access to facilities during these maintenance activities may also occur.

Changes to project facilities at Hell Hole Reservoir Spillway, South Fork Long Canyon Diversion and French Meadows Powerhouse may have short-term construction impacts from the delivery and use of construction equipment and materials. Impacts may include disturbance to wildlife and wildlife habitat including special status plants and wildlife. Changes in project operations and maintenance and their potential long term impacts to wildlife habitat, cultural resources and recreation opportunities are the same as those described above.

## **REQUEST FOR INFORMATION**

Federal, state and local resource agencies, other governmental entities, Native American tribes, environmental and other non-governmental organizations, and individuals are requested to identify and submit any information that they believe pertinent to the analysis of the project-specific and/or cumulative effects of the project operations and maintenance under the new license and proposed changes or additions to existing project facilities. Types of information requested include, but are not limited to:

- Identification of, and information about, issues that should be addressed in the CEQA environmental analysis prior to PCWA submitting a draft license application to FERC.
- Identification of, and information about, issues that should be addressed in a CEQA environmental analysis prior to the SWRCB issuing a 401 Certification.

Should you have any questions regarding the scope of the proposed project, or the proposed scoping meeting, please contact Mal Toy at (530) 823-4889.

Sincerely,  
PLACER COUNTY WATER AGENCY

Mal Toy  
Director of Resource Development