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On 7/7/2008, the following Filing was submitted to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), Washington D.C.:

Filer: Friends of the River
Friends of the River (as Agent)

Docket(s): P-2079-000
P-2079-001
P-2079-061

Filing Type: Comment on Filing
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Kimberly D. Bose, Secretary
Federal Energy Regulatory Commission
888 First Street, N.E., Room 1A
Washington, D.C. 20426

July 3, 2008

Re: Middle Fork American River Project, FERC No. 2079-061, Placer County Water Agency
Proposed Study Plan

Dear Secretary Bose:

Friends of the River (FOR) has reviewed the Recreation Resources Technical Study Plans submitted by the Placer County Water Agency (PCWA) in the above referenced proceeding and has identified some deficiencies that require clarifications and refinements in the public safety, trails, and boating flow elements of the PCWA proposed Recreation Resources study plans.

Specifically, the study objectives include "Identify existing public safety measures and concerns"¹ but fail to include any objectives or plans to study *how* to address or mitigate safety concerns that are identified. In addition, the plans fail to inventory and examine opportunities to replace trail-bridge access that was lost with the failure of Hell Hole Dam in 1964. Finally, the range of flow conditions to be examined do not correspond to boatable flows that are generated from project releases.

Public Safety

The PCWA Rec 4 proposed study defines the extent of the study area as including "the bypass and peaking reaches associated with the Middle Fork American River Project..." (MFP) and identifies the "potential license condition" outcome as "[p]ublic safety measures." (*Rec 4-1*)

The major peaking reach of the MFP contains debris caused by the Hell Hole Dam failure in December 1964 when the Middle Fork American River Project (FERC Project No. 2079) was under construction. The exposed steel, concrete, and other debris left from the washed-out Highway 49 Bridge are the most notable safety hazards resulting from the failure of the dam. The debris was not removed after the failure because the Bureau of Reclamation's proposed Auburn dam was expected to be constructed and this portion of the MFP peaking reach would be closed to swimming and navigation. Now, 44 years later, Auburn dam has not been

¹ Study Objectives, *Rec 4 – Stream-based Recreation Opportunities Technical Study Plan*, Rec 4-1, PCWA, December 2007. (Attachment A)

constructed, is on indefinite hold, and the State Water Resources Control Board is proposing to revoke the water rights associated with the Auburn dam.² This year, as a result of the closure of the Auburn dam diversion tunnel and the creation of PCWA's MFP water diversion project in the restored reach of river, the public-access river closure ended and public navigation of this easy class-two river reach allowed.³

The debris, including exposed steel and rebar, is an obvious man-made public safety hazard for which the Commission has already been notified.⁴ The California State Department of Parks and Recreation, which manages these lands for the Bureau of Reclamation, posted warning signs near the put-in for the white-water recreation feature constructed by Reclamation and PCWA at the MFP water diversion site (American River Pump Station). The signs are upstream of the old Highway 49 bridge wreckage and the American River Pump Station. The signs warn boaters of the danger of debris downstream. (See Attachment G) These signs were installed in April 2008 when the long-closed 4-mile river section was opened for public use.



If the PCWA proposed studies are to serve their stated purpose to inform the Commission about public safety *measures* for potential license conditions, it would be best if there were studies to actually accomplish that purpose. Thus, the proposed PCWA study objectives (Rec 4-1) should be clarified to include studies of hazard removal and mitigation measures, including cost assessments, for identified hazards.

This lack of studies to develop mitigation and removal strategies for project-related safety hazards is also carried on in the proposed Public Safety element of the proposed Rec 4 study plan. A process for "identifying safety concerns," is described, but no process for studying mitigation and removal *measures* to inform the licensing decision is included. (Rec 4-7)

² "Auburn dam may be dealt death blow," Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee, May 9, 2008 (Attachment C); In the American River Water Resources Investigation cover letter from USBR Regional Director Roger Patterson, 1997, and Record of Decision, 1998 (Attachment D), the USBR could no longer identify a federal role in meeting the water supply needs of the service area once slated to be served by Auburn dam.

³ "Changing Channels, River restoration takes shape," Gus Thomsen, Auburn Journal, September 4, 2007; "American River back in its bed," Carie Peyton Dahlberg, Sacramento Bee, September 6, 2007; "Ideas flowing for recreational opportunities at newly restored channel," Gus Thompson, Auburn Journal, September 9, 2007; "Channel Project Nearing Completion," Gus Thomson, Auburn Journal, September 29, 2007. (Attachment E)

⁴ Protect American River Canyons (PARC) April 11, 2008 scoping comments to FERC Secretary Bose re: Middle Fork Project, FERC No. 2079. (Attachment F)

PCWA responded to PARC's scoping concern about the public safety issue caused by the bridge debris in PCWA's letter to FERC dated May 23, 2008, which contains PCWA "Attachment B – Summary of Comments Received on Pre-Application Document/Technical Study Plans and PCWA's Responses and Associated Actions." PCWA summarized the issue and responded by describing this as a request for a PM&E measure and stating: Future Discussion Item: Potential discussion item for consideration during development of future PM&E measures (Note: issues are outside of FERC jurisdiction, may be addressed in third party agreement). (Attachment B, page 2). FOR appreciates PCWA's recognition that this public safety concern is a potential PM&E measure supported by a license condition. However, the question of whether this matter is within FERC's jurisdiction is for the Commission to decide.

However, one specific river-flow public-safety study is proposed in this section: to determine and document whether signs exist at river crossings to warn users of flow fluctuations. *(Rec 4-7)* This proposed study was highlighted because the concern was already identified. Clearly, as evidenced by the new official warning signs, the public-safety concern we highlight has also already been identified by the managing agency and, for consistency purposes, should be placed among the specific studies in the revised study plan.

See our annotated version of the Rec 4 Study Plan for language modifications to address the missing plans to achieve the outcome of public safety measure license conditions. Our clarifying language and refinements are underlined and in green.

Trail Bridges

PCWA's proposed Rec 4 study plan identifies a goal of a "potential license condition" for "public access measures." *(Rec 4-1)*

The collapse of PCWA's Hell Hole Dam (while under construction) in 1964 wiped out several foot and vehicle bridges crossing the Rubicon and Middle Fork American Rivers. Consequently, some public lands along these rivers enjoy less public access than they did 44 years ago. All these bridges are located on river segments where flows are controlled by PCWA facilities. PCWA should consult with the relevant public land agencies and conduct a study to determine the need, cost, and feasibility to replace all bridges affected by the 1964 event.

An incomplete list of bridges affected by the 1964 event include the Old Rubicon Trail Bridge on the South Fork Rubicon (just upstream of its confluence with the main stem), the Frey Trail Bridge on the Rubicon (which provided access to the Old Rubicon and South Fork Trails from the Frey and Hunters Trails), the Greenwood Bridge on the Middle Fork American, and the Highway 49 Bridge on the North Fork American (below the confluence with the Middle Fork).⁵ The Highway 49 Bridge was replaced but debris from the old bridge remains in the river. In this case, the study should determine the cost and feasibility of removing debris for public-safety purposes.

The study plan should also include a consultation with public land agencies to determine the need, cost, and feasibility of enhancing access to public lands by building other footbridges across the Rubicon and Middle Fork American. One of the few footbridges wiped out by the Hell Hole Dam collapse and subsequently replaced was the Nevada Point Trail Bridge across the Rubicon River. This bridge and its appurtenant trails provided access to the portion of the Rubicon classified as a Wild Trout Stream by the Department of Fish and Game in recognition of its outstanding backcountry wild trout fishery. The Nevada Point Trail Bridge was destroyed in the 1997 flood. The bridge study should address potential replacement of this bridge and the construction of others that would enhance enjoyment of public lands along the river segments affected by PCWA flow releases.

⁵ The inventory of lost bridges should be well-known to PCWA. One bridge, The Greenwood Bridge, has already been identified in MFP scoping comments filed with the Commission (PARC April 11, 2008). (Attachment F)

We estimate that a comprehensive study to determine the need, cost, and feasibility of replacing old bridges or building new ones would cost approximately \$30,000 to \$60,000.

As near as we can determine, the PCWA proposed study plan has no provisions for identifying trail-bridge access *measures* to mitigate what was lost with the failure of Hell Hole Dam, or any others lost as a result of the failure. Similarly, there is no study to develop engineering assessments on the design and cost estimates of such bridge replacements. Like the old Highway 49 bridge debris, this bridge was located in the proposed Auburn dam reservoir, a project on indefinite hold, and for which the State Water Resources Control Board is proposing to revoke its water rights.

We propose language in the Rec 4 study proposal to address this issue.

Range of Flows for Studies for Boatable Flows in the Peaking Reach

The PCWA proposed studies include "whitewater flow studies to refine boatable flow ranges for each of the runs in the peaking reach." Among those runs is "The Confluence to Oregon Bar" (*Rec 4-6*). This is the reach of river with the Highway 49 Bridge debris in the river and also the location of PCWA's river restoration and American River Pump Station Project. It is also subject to considerable augmentation of flows from the North Fork American River, particularly in the winter and spring when North flows are high.

Yet the studies limit "the maximum flow evaluated during the study will be 1,000 cfs, the flow capacity of the Oxbow Powerhouse."

It is, of course, appropriate to evaluate the range of potential flows that might be experienced as a result of project operations. However, downstream of the North Fork American River confluence, routine flows in the Confluence to Oregon Bar reach experienced in the winter and spring as a result of project operations can be considerably more than 1,000 cfs.

If the proposed PCWA study objectives (including "public safety...concerns") are to be met in this reach, higher flows should be assessed for the study-objective purposes.

We propose some changes to the Rec 4 study proposal to address this issue.

Final Remarks

FOR's request for modifying the REC 4 technical study plan will not delay or change the consensus agreement of the parties to "expedite the Study Plan Determination Process and waive the Commission's regulations." The additional work is not time sensitive and can be done in 2009. Our proposal to add this study as part of the relicensing process should not change the relicensing schedule.

Attachment A contains FOR's specific proposed changes to REC 4. All changes are underlined and in green type. Attachment B is a study rationale. Attachment G is an collection of photographs of the Highway 49 debris hazard signs and field. The additional attachments support some of the narrative in this letter.

Respectfully submitted,

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REC 4 – Stream-based Recreation Opportunities Technical Study Plan Attachment A**POTENTIAL RESOURCE ISSUE:**

Stream-based recreation opportunities.

PROJECT NEXUS:

Project operations modify the flow regime in bypass and peaking reaches, potentially affecting stream-based recreation opportunities and activities. Project operations and related facilities facilitate recreational use of the river downstream where public safety hazards exist and which were created during the initial construction of the project in 1964.

POTENTIAL LICENSE CONDITION:

- Recreation Plan
 - Instream flow releases
 - Facility modifications
 - Dissemination of flow information
 - Public safety measures
 - Public access measures

STUDY OBJECTIVES:

- Characterize stream-based recreational opportunities.
- Identify a range of flows in the bypass and peaking reaches that provide for stream-based recreation opportunities, such as angling, water-play, mining and whitewater boating.
- Characterize stream crossing conditions at specific crossings in the peaking reach.
- Determine mechanisms for disseminating flow information to the public.
- Identify existing public safety measures and concerns. Identify measures to mitigate or remove safety hazards
- Identify and characterize existing public safety hazards from debris left in the river from the destruction of State Highway 49 bridge by Hell Hole Dam failure in 1964 and develop measures to remove and dispose of hazardous debris or otherwise mitigate the safety hazards.

EXTENT OF STUDY AREA:

The study area includes the bypass and peaking reaches associated with the Middle Fork American River Project (MFP or Project) as identified in Table REC 4-1.

STUDY APPROACH:

This study plan focuses on characterizing stream-based recreation activities and opportunities that occur along the bypass and peaking reaches associated with the MFP. Reservoir-based

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recreation opportunities and activities are addressed in REC 3 – Reservoir Recreation Opportunities Technical Study Plan (TSP).

Describe General Stream-based Recreation Opportunities

- Using existing information sources, characterize and describe the stream-based recreational opportunities, activities, experiences, and preferences in the bypass and peaking reaches, including angling, waterplay, equestrian use, mining and whitewater boating. Existing information sources that will be used include, but are not limited to, published guidebooks and maps, brochures available from local guides, outfitters and clubs, and data and reports available from government agencies such as the USDA-FS and the Auburn State Recreation Area (ASRA).
- Acquire and review data currently being developed by the California State Parks as part of the ASRA Management Plan update. Summarize pertinent information to assist in describing stream-based recreation use and activities along the Middle Fork American River and North Fork American River between Indian Bar Rafting Access and Oregon Bar Access.
- Utilize information developed through the REC 2 – Recreation Visitor Surveys TSP to describe stream-based recreation activities, experience, and the relationship between flow and user satisfaction, where appropriate.
- Based on the existing information review, develop a map or set of maps showing the locations of popular waterplay, swimming, fishing spots and whitewater boating runs. These maps will also show the locations of developed recreation facilities and land jurisdictional boundaries in the vicinity of the Project.
- Develop a map or set of maps showing the primary roads and trails used to access popular water play, swimming, fishing spots, whitewater boating runs and stream crossings located along the Project bypass and peaking reaches. This map will be developed using GIS information obtained from the USDA-FS, ASRA, and other government sources, with specific trails, access roads, and stream crossings highlighted based on information provided by interested stakeholders.

Summarize Hydrologic Information

- Utilize the available historical flow information to describe flows at specific locations (nodes) in the bypass and peaking reaches under impaired and unimpaired conditions. The data will be presented for five water year types: critically dry, dry, normal, above normal, and wet. The data will be presented graphically and in tabular format and will be reduced to either daily or hourly time steps, depending upon the availability of data. All data will be provided to the Recreation Technical Working Group (TWG).

Develop Activity Specific Information - Trail Use at Stream Crossings**Describe Western States and Tevis Cup Trail Routes and Crossings**

- Using existing information, describe and map the primary routes used for the Tevis Cup and Western States endurance races, including the timing of these events and coordination efforts with PCWA regarding flows that allow for crossing of the Middle Fork American River by race participants. Highlight the specific locations where these routes cross the Middle Fork American River below Oxbow Powerhouse (currently understood

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to be at Poverty Bar and Greenwood). Describe and characterize the results of stream crossing flow studies previously conducted by PG&E.

- Describe how PCWA, endurance race, and whitewater boating representatives currently coordinate flow releases with respect to endurance races.

Implement Structured Group Interviews

- Develop additional information regarding wet (i.e., physically wadable) stream crossings associated with the primary trails that intersect the peaking reach, including, for example, those used by equestrians, hikers, mountain bikers, and those used for the Western States and Tevis Cup endurance races. This information would be developed by conducting structured interviews with a Trail User/Stream Crossing Focus Group comprised of representatives of the Western States Trail Foundation, Tevis Cup event organizers, equestrians, other trail users, PCWA, and resource agency representatives. The focus of this group will be to develop additional information about preferred stream crossing conditions, endurance event timing, coordination with PCWA, and safety concerns.
 - In consultation with the Recreation TWG develop a series of interview questions that are specific to the focus group. The series of questions would be used to help guide the focus group session and to address specific information needs identified by the Recreation TWG.
 - Assemble groups of users who are interested in participating in the focus group.
 - Conduct the focus group session. Aerial video and/or aerial photographs and maps will be available for use during the focus group session.
 - Utilize the information developed through focus group session to expand upon the information developed through existing sources.

Conduct Stream Crossing Flow Studies

Assemble a group of stream crossing users (including, for example, waders, hikers, and equestrian riders) to assess stream crossing conditions over a range of flows at specific (preferred) locations in the peaking reach. This assessment would be performed in coordination with the instream flow study to be conducted as part of the AQ 1 – Instream Flow TSP and the whitewater boating flow study(s) described below. The locations to be assessed would be determined in consultation with the Recreation TWG, as would the survey instrument for conducting the assessment.

Conduct studies to identify and develop design and cost estimates to replace bridge crossings destroyed as a result of the Hell Hole Dam failure.

Working with resource agencies and interested stakeholders identify bridges that were destroyed in the 1964 Hell Hole Dam failure, develop replacement design alternatives, and cost estimates.

Determine Flow Travel Times

- Use information developed as part of the AQ 1 – Instream Flow TSP, to identify water travel time between Oxbow Powerhouse and Oregon Bar over a range of flows.

Develop Activity Specific Information - Mining

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- Identify and map the locations of mining locations in the bypass and peaking reaches based on consultation with recreation specialists.
- Identify and map the location of existing mining claims within or immediately adjacent to the bypass and peaking reaches using information maintained by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

Develop Activity Specific Information - Angling**Implement Structured Group Interviews**

- Develop additional information regarding the angling opportunities in bypass and peaking reaches by conducting structured interviews with an Angling Focus Group. This group will be comprised of local fishing guides and outfitters, local anglers, business owners, PCWA, resource agency specialists, and other knowledgeable persons. The focus of the interviews will be to develop additional information such as popular fishing spots, fishing access, safety concerns, flow-related issues, and list of comparable regional fishing streams. Potential angling group participants will be identified by the Recreation TWG.
 - In consultation with the Recreation TWG develop a series of interview questions that are specific to the focus group. The series of questions would be used to help guide the focus group session and to address specific information needs identified by the Recreation TWG, including discussions regarding access and support facilities.
 - Assemble groups of users who are interested in participating in the focus group.
 - Conduct the focus group session. Aerial video and/or aerial photographs and maps will be available for use during the focus group session.
 - Utilize the information developed through focus group session to expand upon the information developed through existing sources.

Conduct Angling Flow Studies

- Assemble a group of anglers to assess fishing conditions (fishability) over a range of flows at specific (preferred) locations in the peaking reach in coordination with the instream flow study to be conducted as part of the AQ 1 – Instream Flow TSP and the whitewater boating flow study(s) described below. The locations to be assessed would be determined in consultation with the Recreation TWG, as would the survey instrument for conducting the assessment.
- Assemble a group of anglers to assess fishing conditions over a range of flows at specific (preferred) locations on the Rubicon River below Ellicotts Bridge. This assessment would be performed in coordination with the instream flow study to be conducted as part of the AQ 1 – Instream Flow TSP. The locations to be assessed would be determined in consultation with the Recreation TWG, as would the survey instrument for conducting the assessment.
- Estimate range of flows that support angling in the peaking reach and Rubicon River below Ellicotts Bridge based on the field assessment.
- Characterize angling fishability in the peaking reach and Rubicon River below Ellicotts Bridge in different water year types under impaired and unimpaired flows.

Develop Activity Specific Information - Whitewater Boating**Describe Whitewater Boating Opportunities**

- Map the locations of existing whitewater boating runs in each of the bypass and peaking reaches based on published maps and literature, consultation with local and regional whitewater boating groups, and recreation specialists.

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- Map the locations of existing debris in the North Fork downstream of the confluence of the North and Middle Forks which pose threats to public safety caused by the washout of the State Highway 49 bridge in December 1964 by the failure of the uncompleted Hell Hole Dam. Mapping will be done in consultation with local and regional whitewater boating groups, recreation, and water safety specialists at various flow rates.
- Describe and characterize each whitewater boating run, including: access points (put-in and take-out), shuttle routes, length of run, gradient, portages, level of difficulty, types of water crafts, estimated boatable flow ranges, support facilities, safety concerns, and any known limiting factors. The descriptions will be developed using information contained in published whitewater guides and completing a site reconnaissance. Verify/augment information during focused group interviews.
- Identify a preliminary list of channel and flow-dependent factors that could influence boatable flows for each activity type through review of aerial photograph and the Project video. Verify/augment the list during structured group interviews.
- Develop a list of comparable regional whitewater boating resources. Verify/augment the list during structured group interviews.
- Summarize commercial whitewater boating use in the peaking reach using records maintained by ASRA, augmented by information developed as part of the REC 1 – Recreation Use and Facility Assessment TSP.
- Characterize private boating use in peaking reach based on information developed as part of the REC 1 – Recreation Use and Facility Assessment TSP.

Implement Structured Group Interviews

- Develop additional information regarding whitewater boating along the bypass and peaking reaches by conducting structured interviews with a Whitewater Boating Focus Group. This group would be comprised of PCWA, commercial outfitters, guides, instructional teachers, local and regional boaters, resource agency specialists and other knowledgeable persons representing a range of interests (i.e., skill levels, watercraft, various commercial enterprises). This group will focus on developing additional details about specific boating runs, existing and potential uses, access conditions or constraints, boatable flow ranges, types of watercraft used, and timing.
 - In consultation with the Recreation TWG develop a series of questions that are specific to this group. The series of questions would be used to help guide the focus group session and to address specific information needs identified by the Recreation TWG.
 - Prior to the focused session, obtain information from private whitewater boaters (boater's diaries) regarding the specific dates of previous whitewater boating experience in the bypass and peaking reaches. Using the hydrologic record, identify the specific flows when the previous runs were completed by the private boaters.
 - Assemble groups of users who are interested in participating in focus group interviews.
 - Conduct the focus group session. Aerial video and/or aerial photographs and maps will be available for use during the focus group session.

Whitewater Boating Flow Study to Identify Boatable Flows in the Peaking Reach

- Conduct whitewater flow studies to refine boatable flow ranges for each of the runs in

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the peaking reach, including:

- The Indian Bar Rafting Access to Ruck-a-Chucky (also known as Greenwood and Driver's Flat)
- Ruck-a-Chucky to Mammoth Bar
- Mammoth Bar to the Confluence of the Middle and North Forks of the American River
- The Confluence to Oregon Bar

This study would focus on identifying boatable flow ranges for a variety of watercraft used by both commercial and private boaters, representing a range of interests and skill levels. However, the maximum flow release evaluated during the study will be 1,000 cfs, the flow capacity of the Oxbow Powerhouse. These studies should also characterize flow-dependent manmade hazards such as the old Highway 49 bridge debris field to assist in the development of hazard mitigation measure studies.

- Develop a whitewater boating survey instrument in consultation with the Recreation TWG. The survey instrument will be used to obtain information on physical logistics and the experiential values of whitewater boating runs under different flows. Conduct flow studies using a team of boaters with requisite skill levels using a variety of watercraft to identify boatable flow ranges.
- Document and record river conditions in the whitewater boating runs during the flow studies using video and photographs.
- Utilize the information developed during the flow study(s) combined with hydrologic information to characterize whitewater boating opportunities in the peaking reach under impaired and unimpaired flows in different water year types.
- Use information developed as part of the AQ1 – Instream Flow TSP to identify water travel time at different locations in peaking reach over a range of flows, with consideration to the effect that flow ramping might have on travel time.

Potential Whitewater Boating Studies on Runs in Bypass Reaches

- The Recreation Technical Work Group will utilize the information developed through the focus group session to expand upon the information developed through existing sources. In consultation with the Recreation TWG and upon review of other TWG objectives, determine if whitewater boating studies are necessary to further assess whitewater boating opportunities in the bypass reaches based on information developed in the tasks above and a review of the hydrologic record. If appropriate, identify target reaches where flow studies are needed and determine study objectives that consider the physical and operational constraints of the Project, and PCWA's ability to release flows. This flow study proposal will be sent to the Plenary for approval.
- If determined to be necessary by the Plenary and the Recreation TWG, conduct whitewater boating studies using the methods described above under the peaking reach on specific runs in the bypass reaches.

Flow Information Dissemination

- Characterize the type of flow information that is currently available to the public through, for example, existing web sites and flow phones.

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Attachment A

- Identify, map, and characterize existing stream gaging stations (location, equipment, and data collection capabilities) in target reaches.
- Consult with stream-based recreational users, for example whitewater boaters, anglers, equestrians, swimmers, and waders, to identify target reaches or locations where flow information may enhance stream-based recreation opportunities.

Public Safety

- Public and worker safety will be described in Land 3 – Emergency Action and Public Safety TSP
- Determine whether there are signs present at key river access and crossing points that warn the public of potential flow fluctuations. If present, document the condition and location of these signs and describe their content.
- Use the results of surveys completed as part of REC 2 – Recreation Visitor Surveys TSP and consultation with resource agencies and local user groups to identify potential safety concerns along the bypass and peaking reaches.
- Conduct studies to develop hazard mitigation measures for identified hazards.
- Identify river locations where debris from the washed out State Highway 49 bridge exists and poses a public safety hazard. Develop an engineering assessment of the measures and costs to remove and dispose of the debris or otherwise mitigate the hazards.

SCHEDULE:

Date	Activity
September through December 2007	Acquire, compile, review, and summarize existing recreation information and hydrologic data.
December 2007 and January 2008	Consult with Recreation TWG regarding focus group participants and survey questions.
February through April 2008	Conduct structured focus group interviews.
April and May 2008	Consult with Recreation TWG and develop survey instruments for angling, stream crossing, and whitewater boating flow studies.
March through October 2008	Conduct angling, stream crossing, and whitewater boating flow studies.
September 2008 through February 2009	Complete data analysis and prepare draft report.
March 2009	Submit draft report to Recreation TWG.
April and May 2009	TWG review and comment period.
June through October 2009	Resolve comments and prepare final report.
April through October 2009	<u>Conduct flow studies to identify washed out Highway 49 bridge debris safety hazards in the river, develop engineering cost study for removal and disposal measures, and prepare report.</u> If appropriate, conduct contingency whitewater boating studies, data analysis and report production.

REFERENCES:

None.

REC 4 – Stream-based Recreation Opportunities Technical Study Plan **Attachment A**

TABLES



Study Rationale

FOR proposed refinements, Project 2079
PCWA Rec 4 – Stream-based Recreation Opportunities Technical Study Plan

July 3, 2008

This memo supports Friend of the River's request for refinements in PCWA's proposed study plan — and our specific study-plan proposals. These refinements are underlined and highlighted in green, and are incorporated in the existing text of PCWA's proposed Rec 4 study plan (Attachment A):

Goals and objectives and information to be obtained:

Public safety measure studies: The proposed study refinements are to achieve the purpose already identified in the existing study plan of developing public safety measures as proposed license conditions. The PCWA proposed studies only identify public safety *concerns* and do not study public safety *measures* to mitigate or eliminate avoidable public safety hazards.

Bridge replacement studies: The proposed studies are to support the PCWA study goal of developing “public access measures” for a “potential license condition.”

Range of whitewater boating flow studies: No fundamental changes in the goals and objectives are contemplated. The requested refinements would be to explore a greater range of common flows that would occur because of project operations than the original study plan, which failed to recognize tributary-flow augmentations that occur in the most downstream reach. An additional objective of examining a higher range of flows would be to more fully characterize the bridge debris hazards that might be encountered by whitewater boaters in the Confluence to Oregon Bar peaking reach of the river. This information would be used to support development of measures to remove or mitigate these hazards.

Resource Agency Goals:

Public safety measure studies: The Commission and most land managing agencies place a high priority on public safety — particularly the removal of abandoned manmade hazards on public rivers and wildlands. The United States Bureau of Reclamation, which owns the lands with the hazardous bridge debris caused by the failure of the Commission licensed Hell Hole Dam, closed the Auburn dam diversion tunnel in part as a safety measure to prevent swimmers and boaters from being trapped and drowned in the long tunnel. Reclamation has an affirmative responsibility to protect public safety in the management of the federal lands under its jurisdiction. 16 U.S.C.A. §460/-31(a)(2)(B) states the following:

(2) The Secretary, acting through the Commissioner of Reclamation, shall promulgate such regulations as the Secretary determines to be necessary —

(B) to ensure the protection, comfort, and well-being of the public (including the protection of public safety) with respect to the use of Reclamation lands;

Bridge replacement studies: None identified.

Range of whitewater boating flow studies: Our proposed refinements to the PCWA proposal make no changes to resource agency goals.

Public Interest Considerations:

Public safety measure studies: The public safety interests of the agencies with jurisdiction for the affected lands do not differ materially from the public at large or FOR. As described in the attached Auburn Journal article, "Ideas flowing for recreational opportunities at newly restored channel," there is significant community interest in the safe use of the river restored as a result of PCWA's new American River Pump Station.

Bridge replacement studies: With long abandonment of the Auburn dam, there is increasing use of the American River canyons, and the infrastructure to support this use, including bridges lost and never reconstructed after the failure of Hell Hole Dam.

Range of whitewater boating flow studies: Our proposed refinements to the PCWA proposal make no changes to resource agency goals, nor the public interest in ensuring that public safety measures are effective at the full range of flows that are experienced during project operations.

Existing Information and the Need for Additional Information:

Public safety measure studies: The proposed PCWA study plan includes an identification of safety concerns, which would surely include the one discussed here. The Highway 49 Bridge debris location is obvious, particularly at low flow. The detailed hazards have not been characterized, nor has there been any modern assessments undertaken to mitigate the safety hazards here (dangerous hydraulics, entrapments, impaled with steel, etc.).

Bridge replacement studies: The destroyed bridges are widely known. It is possible that PCWA conducted some preliminary assessments on design and costs for replacements after their destruction by the Hell Hole Dam failure.

Range of whitewater boating flow studies: Our proposed refinements make no fundamental changes to the need and ability to develop flow-suitability information already contemplated in the PCWA proposed study. The one exception is to ensure that flow-dependent safety hazard information is developed for the Highway 49 Bridge debris field as well as for boating suitability studies.

Study Nexus and Informing License Requirements:

Public safety measure studies: The Highway 49 Bridge debris field is in the peaking reach of PCWA's proposed Stream-based Recreation Opportunities Technical Study Plan. The debris field is the result of the failure of PCWA's Commission licensed Hell Hole Dam being

relicensed in this proceeding. The PCWA proposed study plan notes that “public safety measures” are one of the “potential license conditions” that the studies may inform. Actions by Reclamation and PCWA in constructing the American River Pump Project, river restoration project, and whitewater feature has opened up the Confluence to Oregon Bar reach of river to public access, consistent with California and Federal law regarding navigable (small watercraft) rivers.

Bridge replacement studies: The bridges were destroyed by the failure of PCWA’s Commission licensed Hell Hole Dam. They were never rebuilt, in part, because of the pending inundation of the affected lands by Reclamation’s proposed Auburn dam. The Auburn Dam is no longer being proposed by Reclamation for construction, so replacement of the bridges (or redesigned bridges) is a potential management objective. An assessment of the cost and purposes of such replacement could inform Commission licensing decisions and the management plans of the managing agencies.

Range of whitewater boating flow studies: The study nexus for this study refinement is the same as for the PCWA proposed study. An additional study nexus is to ensure that public-safety measures that may be adopted in license articles are appropriate for a fuller range of flows that may be encountered by the public during project operations.

Proposed study methodology:

Public safety measure studies: The proposed refinements are underlined and in green. They are presented at the same level of detail as the PCWA study proposal, and the hazard identification process uses the same techniques, and often the same studies, as other recreation studies proposed by PCWA. We believe that the PCWA team would undertake the hazard mitigation measure development process. Since the debris field is already reasonably well known, the principal job is identifying mitigation and removal measures and associated costs. The cost assessments should not be a difficult undertaking.

Bridge replacement studies: Identification of the sites is already known to the licensee. Reconnaissance level design estimates for bridge replacement would be done by the PCWA team, with consultation by the managing agencies. Study costs will depend on how much preliminary engineering PCWA may have already done after the Hell Hole Dam failure.

Range of whitewater boating flow studies: Methodologies proposed are the same as proposed as PCWA, just a greater range of flows are explored.

Level of effort, cost, suitability of proposed alternatives:

Public safety measure studies: Our study refinement identifies a known safety hazard in the existing study reach. It reduces the need to conduct surveys to identify the safety concern. The debris field is reasonably well defined, and studies to develop measures to mitigate that hazard are not expected to be expensive. Project costs are hard to predict, but we expect that costs will be small in comparison to total relicensing costs. The purpose of the project is public safety —

and costs associated with death and injury could be high. There are no alternative studies being proposed, unless the licensee actually envisioned conducting no studies to remove or mitigate hazards that might be identified in its public-safety concern studies as part of this licensing. The adoption of study requirements to develop potential measures to address identified hazards should save time in comparison to waiting until some undefined time and proceeding where the mitigation measures might actually be considered and potentially adopted by the Commission or other responsible parties.

Bridge replacement studies: Again, no alternative studies are being proposed to address this project-related impact.

Range of whitewater boating flow studies: Again, we believe that our refinement simply addresses an oversight in the description of studies in the PCWA proposed study proposal.



The Sacramento Bee

Auburn dam may be dealt death blow

By Matt Weiser - mweiser@sacbee.com
Last Updated 6:09 am PDT Friday, May 9, 2008
Story appeared in MAIN NEWS section, Page A22

A long-stalled Auburn dam on the American River has suffered many defeats. But the next could be truly fatal.

The State Water Resources Control Board plans to revoke the water rights held by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation for the project. The unfinished dam, in other words, would no longer have any water to hold back.

Reclamation halted construction on a dam more than 30 years ago due to earthquake concerns, leaving the river's north fork heavily scarred but not permanently blocked. A host of environmental concerns and ballooning costs have delayed the project ever since.

Though still coveted by some officials in the region, a dam is probably doomed without water.

"If they lose the water rights, it would be very problematic, I would think," said Bruce Kranz, a Placer County supervisor and chairman of the American River Authority, a joint-powers agency and leading dam advocate.



A 1965 artist's conception of how an Auburn dam would have looked built at a section of the American River is contrasted with the site in 2006, where preparatory work had been done on the river but stopped in the 1970s because of earthquake concerns. Bryan Patrick / Sacramento Bee file, 2006

The original Auburn dam was approved by Congress in 1965. It was designed to store 2.5 million acre-feet of water behind a dam nearly 700 feet high adjacent to the city of Auburn.

Reclamation secured water rights for a dam from the state in 1970. Those rights allowed the agency to store a staggering amount of water – 5 million acre-feet – at different times of year for purposes ranging from power generation and recreation to farming and urban consumption.

Under state law, water rights expire if not used. But Reclamation was granted an extension in 1984 on the condition that it present a revised project for approval by Dec. 31, 1987. It failed to do so and has asked for three more extensions since 1988.

The state did not grant those extensions, nor did it revoke the permits as a result.

Bill Rukeyser, a spokesman for the state water board, said Reclamation has run out of chances by failing to make progress on the dam.

"It's our understanding they will not strongly contest it, because obviously the project is not going ahead," he said. "Basically, time is up, so this is simply a matter of the water rights division taking care of business."

But Reclamation spokesman Jeff McCracken said his agency will argue to keep the rights. It requested a hearing on the matter before the water board, set for July 21 in Sacramento. A prehearing conference will be held June 4. Both are open to the public.

"This remains a congressionally mandated project," McCracken said. "The bottom line is, we continue to want to hold onto those rights because Congress told us to do something and it hasn't yet been completed."

In reality, the project is moldering in legal limbo. It remains federally authorized, but costs have grown so dramatically that restarting construction would require a new vote by Congress.

That is unlikely, because the project's environmental consequences would be far more controversial today than when the dam was first proposed. Also, the new water supply it would create is much less than Reclamation's paper water rights.

Ronald Stork, a senior policy advocate at Friends of the River, estimated an Auburn dam would yield something less than 300,000 acre-feet of new water supply. That's not nearly enough to justify the project's huge cost, he said.

The most recent estimate, completed last year by Reclamation, put the cost to finish the dam at a minimum of \$6 billion. That's 12 times greater than the originally authorized cost.

"You either have to find very wealthy beneficiaries who are prepared to pay a heck of a lot for the water, or some taxpayers somewhere who are prepared to be fleeced," Stork said.

The project also is losing its most committed supporter, Rep. John Doolittle, R-Roseville, who announced in January he wouldn't seek re-election.

If the water rights are revoked, another party can apply for them. But they would likely get much less water, because science has shown the environment can't sustain the diversions allowed by the 38-year-old permits.

For his part, longtime dam supporter Kranz has turned his focus elsewhere.

"Politically, it's not there right now," he said. "I want to work on things that have a chance of being successful."

About the writer: Call The Bee's Matt Weiser, (916) 321-1264.



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF RECLAMATION
Mid-Pacific Regional Office
2800 Cottage Way
Sacramento, California 95825-1898

IN REPLY
REFER TO:

MP-152
ENV-6.00

NOV 18 1997

To: Interested Parties

From: Roger K. Patterson
Regional Director

Subject: Final Environmental Impact Statement and Planning Report for the American River Water Resources Investigation

The Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) has completed the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Planning Report for the American River Water Resources Investigation (ARWRI).

Reclamation and the Sacramento Metropolitan Water Authority (SMWA) prepared a joint draft environmental impact report/environmental impact statement (DEIR/DEIS) for the ARWRI in February 1996. SMWA has decided not to prepare a Final Environmental Impact Report at this time pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act.

The purpose of the ARWRI was to develop a water management program to meet the future water needs of the region through the year 2030. The FEIS describes the environmental effects of three alternatives, including a no-action alternative. The SMWA and Reclamation identified alternatives that will provide for the water supply needs of California's Central Valley from the Bear and Feather rivers on the north to the Stanislaus River on the south, and from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta on the west to the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountain range. Two basic alternative plans were developed - conjunctive use and Auburn Dam. Many components are shared between the alternatives, and sizing may vary according to which alternative is selected. The DEIR/DEIS analyzed the impacts of these alternatives at a program level of detail and will serve as the umbrella document for future site-specific environmental documents.

Reclamation is not proposing to initiate any Federal action to meet the local area's needs. Reclamation will, as appropriate, cooperate with local agencies as specific water management activities with applicable statutes, including the National Environmental Policy Act and the Endangered Species Act, where applicable.

The FEIS incorporates the DEIR/DEIS by reference and includes all comments received on the DEIR/DEIS and responses to those comments. No decision will be made on the proposed action until 30 days after release of the FEIS. After the 30-day waiting period, Reclamation will complete a Record of Decision which states the action that will be implemented and will discuss all factors leading to the decision.

RECORD OF DECISION

AMERICAN RIVER WATER RESOURCES INVESTIGATION FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

MAY 1998

I. INTRODUCTION

This document constitutes the Record of Decision of the Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), Mid-Pacific Region, regarding the proposed action for the American River Water Resources Investigation (ARWRI). The ARWRI is the subject of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), ARWRI, California (FES 97-36, dated November 27, 1997), developed in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

II. RECOMMENDED DECISION

Reclamation has not identified a federal role for meeting the future water needs of the ARWRI study area: therefore, a federal program is not being selected.

While no federal action will be initiated to meet the water needs of the local area, Reclamation will, as appropriate, cooperate with local agencies as specific water management activities are proposed and implemented. Reclamation would exercise its statutory authorities, such as that afforded by the Central Valley Project Improvement Act, to provide assistance in implementation and cooperate in the process with local lead officials. Such cooperation may involve individual actions on part of Reclamation that constitute "major Federal actions", and as such would require that Reclamation comply with the NEPA and other federal statutes. Under those circumstances, Reclamation would prepare the required additional documentation.

III. OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

The FEIS evaluated two Action Alternatives and a No Action Alternative. The alternatives provide a means of action through which water needs of the five county (El Dorado, Placer, Sacramento, San Joaquin, and Sutter) study area met through the year 2030.

The *No-Action Alternative* approximates conditions in the study area in the year 2030 without implementation of a water management plan to meet the study areas water needs.

The *Conjunctive Use Alternative* is based on providing regulatory storage in the study area groundwater system by varying the mix of surface water and groundwater used each year to meet water demands. The Conjunctive Use alternative was identified as the Environmentally Superior Alternative in protecting the Nation's environment. This designation is based on the potential impacts associated with the Auburn Dam component being determined as significantly greater than the larger conjunctive use diversion during larger flow events.

The Auburn Dam Alternative includes regulatory storage at a new reservoir on the American River at Auburn. This alternative would increase the "firm" water supply to the study area; however, a certain level of conjunctive use of surface water and groundwater resources would still be required

IV. BASIS OF DECISION AND ISSUES EVALUATED

Reclamation supports the local areas need for developing the means to meet current and future water demands. The Conjunctive Use Alternatives and Auburn Dam Alternative are comprehensive programs to meet water needs of study area. The two alternatives are composed of many components that, if selected on a local level, would be implemented by local water purveyors. A number of components, or facilities, are included in both alternatives and are referred to as Common Elements.

Common Elements included in all of the alternatives evaluated are being considered by the local agencies as a first step toward meeting their long-term needs. Reclamation embraces the local support for the Common Elements, with additional future component select to be conducted by the local agencies. Implementation of Common Elements would require cooperation between purveyors in the regional water community. Although Reclamation is a part of the regional water community, Reclamation will take no independent action on an individual component, or group of components. Reclamation participation would only be initiated through a local sponsor's request. Reclamation could then provide technical assistance or undertake a specific Federal action. If a local sponsor requests Reclamation participation, then Reclamation would first ensure that it has authority from Congress to undertake the action (i.e., a federal role is defined, authorization exists, and the activity is funded.) In accordance with, the Economic and Environmental Principles and Guidelines for Water-Related Land Resources Implementation studies (Principles and Guidelines.) A determination would also be made will be followed to determine whether the action was feasible from the national standpoint. A feasibility determination would typically include conducting project specific environmental analysis and a National Economic Development (NED) or similar economic analysis, pursuant to approximate Federal statues or new authorization.



Changing channels

River restoration project takes shape

*By: Gus Thomson, Journal Staff Writer
Tuesday, September 4, 2007, Auburn Journal*

U.S. Bureau of Reclamation returned water in the American River to its natural streambed on Tuesday at the long-delayed Auburn dam site.

A bureau official said the work will proceed cautiously this week to ensure safety and avoid a discharge of overly muddy water into Folsom Lake downstream.

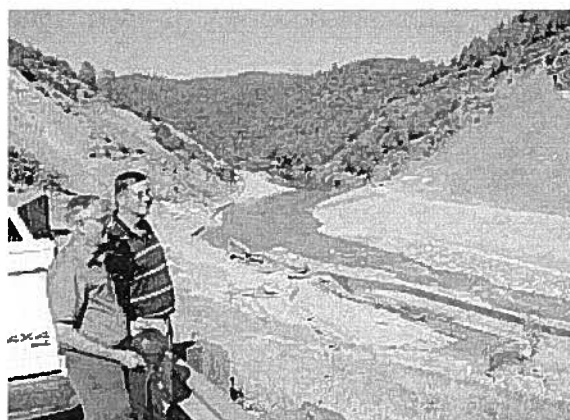
The bureau is urging people to stay away from what remains a construction site.

The bureau and Placer County Water Agency's American River pump station project is also nearing completion in tandem with the river restoration. The river is being re-channeled away from a diversion tunnel built during long-delayed Auburn dam construction in the 1970s while the new pump station will allow the agency to pump water it has rights to for use in Western Placer County.

Mike Finnegan, the bureau's Central California area manager, said Tuesday that construction equipment will initiate a "slow, controlled breach" of an earthen cofferdam this week. That will allow American River water to continue to flow into the tunnel while an increasingly larger volume will move along the newly constructed channel.

That would keep sediment loss to a minimum while allowing the bureau to start the work of moving earth and rock over the half-mile-long tunnel's inlet and outlet.

"It's a significant event for a lot of reasons," Finnegan said. "It's been close to 40 years, give or take a flood or two, since it flowed on the surface."



David Breninger, Placer County Water Agency general manager, left, and Einar Maisch, director of strategic affairs, survey the restoration and re-routing of the American River near Auburn. Tuesday marked the first time water flowed in its natural channel in decades. Courtesy of PCWA

The bureau is stressing that the site is still a construction area and the public is not allowed in, he said.

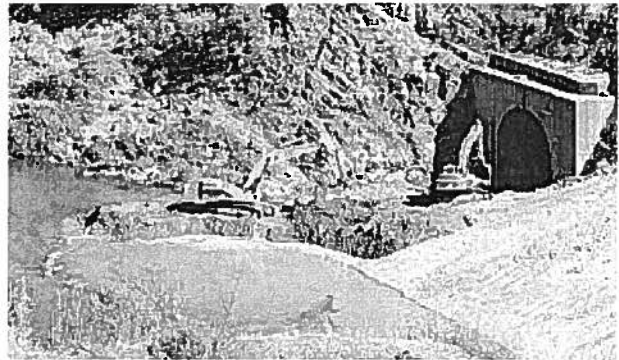
"We're still in construction," Finnegan said. "The grand opening would probably be this spring."

David Breninger, Placer County Water Agency general manager, said the re-channeling work this week was an exciting development for a project that has been under construction since 2003.

"The agency is very proud to be part of the process," Breninger said.

Breninger said he witnessed the first flows at about 4:30 p.m. Tuesday with agency Director of Strategic Affairs Einar Maisch, after water releases in the morning from upstream reservoirs along the Middle Fork of the American River reached the pump station project area.

The Journal's Gus Thomson can be reached at gust@goldcountrymedia.com, or post a comment at auburnjournal.com.



Contractors fill the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's diversion tunnel with rock and soil following removal of the dam at the American River North Fork near Auburn. Courtesy of PCWA



The Sacramento Bee

American River back in its bed

A tunnel, part of the unbuilt Auburn dam project, is being plugged after decades.

By Carrie Peyton Dahlberg - Bee Staff Writer

Published 12:00 am PDT Thursday, September 6, 2007

Story appeared in METRO section, Page B2

The waters of the American River began splashing into their old channel near Auburn this week, freed from a tunnel built decades ago during aborted construction of the Auburn dam.

While the change will create prettier river views and perhaps new whitewater opportunities, it probably won't have much impact on whether the dam is revived, say both friends and foes of a proposed dam.

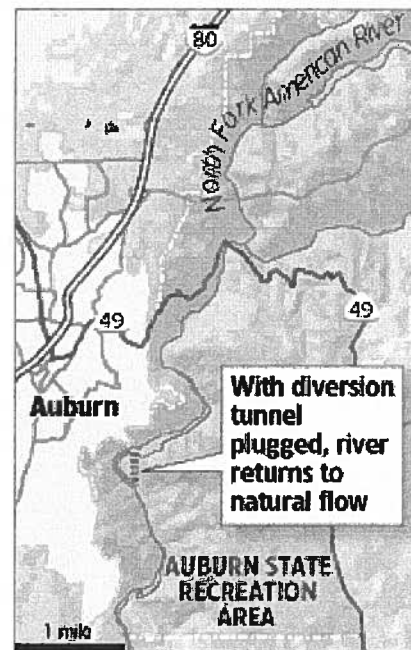
Even its staunchest supporters acknowledge that for now, the Auburn dam has gone dormant, stalled by a change of leadership in Congress, studies outlining high costs, and the political difficulties of a key champion.

The dam, first begun in the 1960s and heralded as a way to protect Sacramento from disastrous floods, was abandoned because of earthquake risks and strong opposition.

"I'm a realist," said Placer County Supervisor Bruce Kranz, a longtime dam advocate. "We won't see any movement in the near term on the Auburn dam unless there's a severe drought or a storm comes in and creates catastrophic events downstream."

Free flowing

After being routed through a tunnel for decades, the American River was restored to its former channel this week, as part of efforts to clean up the site of a never-built Auburn dam.



Map data: ESRI, TeleAtlas, USGS

Sacramento Bee

The movement that is going on this week near Auburn, of earth and rocks and water being shunted about by federal crews, is part of a long-term effort to clean up the old construction site.

The work includes new pumps to deliver water to a growing and thirsty Placer County, and restored river flow through a new series of mini-rapids that will help safely feed those pumps.

The changes were designed to ensure that if Californians someday want an Auburn dam, it would be possible to direct the river back into the tunnel, said Einar Maisch, director of strategic affairs for the Placer County Water Agency.

The 2,400-foot-long tunnel, built to keep the construction site dry, will be capped at both ends but not filled.

Meanwhile, though, "the people have the river back," said Ronald Stork, a senior policy advocate for Friends of the River. "It's going to look better as time progresses, and people are going to have the opportunity to boat on it."

Otis Wollan, who sits on the Placer County Water Agency board, describes the reborn stretch of river as a potential recreational magnet.

"It's within half an hour from downtown Sacramento. It's a 2½ to three mile absolutely beautiful float," Wollan said, and so close to downtown Auburn that it's likely to boost commerce there.

The water agency's Maisch is a little less glowing, cautioning that because of power plants far upstream, the best water flows are unlikely to start until late afternoon.

No matter what future summers bring, though, the federal Bureau of Reclamation is warning that for now, the site is closed to water enthusiasts because of construction.

The decades-long effort to build an Auburn dam retreated into a state of suspended animation after the 2006 elections ended the Republican majority in the House and Senate.

The most vocal activist for the dam in Congress, Rep. John Doolittle, declared after the election: "My range of options is constrained when I'm in the minority."

Since then, Doolittle's entanglement in the deepening investigation of Jack Abramoff and political corruption has virtually sidelined the Roseville Republican.

After an FBI raid on Doolittle's suburban Virginia home in April, the congressman was pressured into stepping down from his seat on the House Appropriations Committee and its energy and water subcommittee. It was from that subcommittee position that Doolittle had been able to steer money toward the revival of the dam when Republicans were in power.

"The congressman still fully supports the idea of the Auburn dam and thinks it's necessary," Gordon Hinkle, his communications director, said Wednesday. "But he realizes that the political climate will not allow for it at this time."

The work under way fulfills a commitment to restore the construction site that the Bureau of Reclamation made in 2000, after prodding from California's attorney general.

The state was concerned that water had been diverted into a tunnel for years.

The Placer County Water Agency was unhappy, too. After work started on the original dam in the 1960s, a pumping station that lifted American River water into a pipeline that supplied Placer County residents was torn down.

The idea had been that once the new reservoir behind the dam filled, gravity would carry water into the pipeline and no pumps would be needed. But as the dam languished, Placer County limped by with temporary pumps, pulled out each winter, to serve a growing population.

Wollan said it got to the point that "either you do a permanent pump station or growth will stop in Placer County. We were talking about no alternative but to essentially declare a moratorium on building."

Work on the new pumps began in 2002, and on Tuesday the Bureau of Reclamation began routing water toward the pumps for testing, by breaking down small sections of a dirt wall that kept water away from the riverbed.

"It's gone a little bit better than we expected," Drew Lessard, the bureau's project manager, said Wednesday afternoon. "The majority of the flow is going through the new river channel."

The channel follows basically the same course the river took before it was diverted into a tunnel. The entire project, including a boat takeout area, is scheduled to be completed in January.

About the writer:

The Bee's Carrie Peyton Dahlberg can be reached at (916) 321-1086 or cpeytondahlberg@sacbee.com. David Whitney of the McClatchy Washington Bureau contributed to this report.



Ideas flowing for recreation opportunities at newly restored river channel

Kayaking, rafting, boating companies looking at options

*By: Gus Thomson, Journal Staff Writer
Sunday, September 9, 2007, Auburn Journal*

While kayakers and rafters won't have access until early next year, the regional buzz is already spreading over the opening of a new stretch of the American River near Auburn.

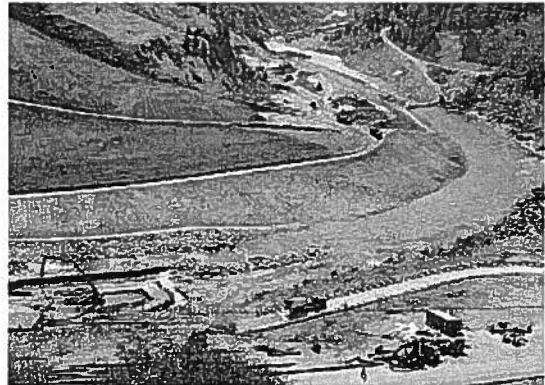
Water started flowing Tuesday through a restored river channel at the Placer County Water Agency's pump station project site, signaling an anticipated influx - probably next spring - of kayakers and rafters to a river run that has been shut down for safety reasons since the early 1970s.

A hazardous half-mile-long diversion tunnel built as part of the now-dormant Auburn dam project kept boaters off that stretch of water.

Wolf Creek Wilderness, a Grass Valley store that caters to kayakers and whitewater-rafting river runners, is looking at the new American River run south of the confluence as another option opening up for boaters.

Ryan Wells, an instructor at Wolf Creek, said information about the new Auburn-area course - which is partly manmade, using giant boulders from the site fixed into concrete - is beginning to filter through enthusiast circles.

"There is some excited murmuring going on," Wells said. "We're all trying to figure out exactly what's there."



While work continues at the Placer County Water Agency pump station project site, water is flowing through the newly completed American River channel near Auburn after three decades of being diverted through a half-mile-long tunnel.

Adding to the anticipation, a slow season because of low snowfall and rainfall cut business for rentals and sales but didn't stop a surge in instruction, Wells said. That's created a pent-up demand for river boating.

"We're looking forward to having another option," he said.

Canyon Raft Rentals in Auburn is close to the Highway 49 drive down into the American River canyon toward the confluence, where most of the boats and kayaks will be launched. Canyon Raft owner John Hauschild said he's moving ahead with plans to provide not only rentals but a shuttle bus for customers into the canyon and out on the return trip from an entrance on Auburn's Maidu Drive. A bus could also travel to the Rattlesnake Bar boat launch near the inlet to Folsom Lake to pick up boaters farther downstream. Hauschild was biking in the canyon when the first flows of American River water began to move through the restored channel Tuesday.

"I went nuts when I saw water in the channel," he said. "I can't wait to try it out myself."

Hauschild said that he's been told that no guided trips will be allowed but the State Parks Department has no trouble with rentals.

"Up to now, I've been sending people other places," he said. "This changes my whole business model. Shuttle buses are going to be the key because it's hard to park at the confluence and the boaters will be on top of the swimmers."

Water began flowing through the reconstructed section of river on Tuesday, a milestone moment in a 15-year effort to provide the water agency with permanent pumps.

The restored river channel is part of an overall \$75 million project that includes the return of a permanent pump station that will allow the agency to pump up to 35,500 acre-feet of water from the river canyon to water customers in Western Placer County. The project also includes recreational access off Maidu Drive and road improvements into the canyon. The agency operated a pump station on the river in the 1960s and early 1970s but it was removed by the federal government to make way for the Auburn dam project. When construction of the dam was suspended in 1977, the water agency was left without a permanent, reliable and year-round pump facility to move water it has rights to into the then-agriculturally rich western section of Placer County. Since then, development has created an even greater demand for the water.

David Breninger, who has managed the countywide water agency for more than 15 years, said the pump station and river restoration project has been the agency's top water resource priority during his tenure.

With the full support of U.S. Rep. John Doolittle, a staunch Auburn dam advocate, the agency began over a dozen years ago to convince federal officials to build a permanent pumping station.

"Congressman Doolittle boldly defended the rights of the agency as well as securing federal funding for this project's success," Breninger said.

Work started in October 2003 and construction is expected to end in January. Until then, the project site will remain off-limits to the public.

Doolittle said Friday that the addition of more facilities in the American River canyon for recreation and water transportation hasn't lessened his resolve to eventually revive construction of a multipurpose dam. Recent federal estimates put the price of a dam at a figure as high as nearly \$10 billion.

The Journal's Gus Thomson can be reached at gust@goldcountrymedia.com, or post a comment at auburnjournal.com.



Print Date: Monday, October 1, 2007

Last modified: Saturday, September 29, 2007
10:47 PM PDT

Channel project nearing completion

By: Gus Thomson, Journal Staff Writer

Just under a month after water started flowing again on a restored American River channel through the Auburn dam site, finishing touches are under way.

One of the major final projects was installation of steel beams on the face of the half-mile-long diversion tunnel that had channeled water underground through the canyon's dam construction area since the early 1970s.

While dam construction was halted nearly 30 years ago, the tunnel had continued to channel the river's water away from its natural stream course - and left the area dangerous and off-limits to boaters.

As part of a \$75 million project by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and the Placer County Water Agency, the river has been re-routed along a sculpted, open-air course and a new permanent pump station installed.

The pump station allows the agency to move water it has rights to on the American River up to a tunnel below Auburn and then direct it through canals and more pumps to growing Western Placer County.

Bob Meador, construction manager with the bureau, said Friday that work has been taking place at the mouth of the tunnel to build a berm and stabilize it with rocks. A wide channel past the tunnel entrance should allow flows during storms. About 400,000 cubic yards of earth and rock were removed from the streambed and placed elsewhere on the site. Lower levels have been hydro seeded and a nearby parking area is due to be paved in coming weeks.



With the American River re-channeled and the Placer County Water Agency's permanent pump station in place, work is nearing completion on the \$75 million project in the canyon below Auburn. Photo by Ben Furtado/Auburn Journal

The public will be kept out of the area while construction takes place on the final stages. Meador said heavy equipment should be removed by the beginning of December, leaving the state Parks Department to prepare for recreational river use sometime after the start of the new year.

Einar Maisch, the water agency's director of strategic affairs, toured the site with other agency officials and the media on Friday. He said the pumps - which will replace temporary pumps that had to be put down every spring and removed in the fall - are being tested and close to fully operational.

They should be available to pump water during canal maintenance shutdowns starting Oct. 14 but if they aren't, the temporary pumps are still in place, Maisch said.



Steel beams have been placed at the entrance to the half-mile long American River diversion tunnel, which has piped the waterway underground since the early 1970s. The channel has been restored and boating will be allowed again early next year. Photo by Ben Furtado/Auburn Journal

Agency Director Mike Lee, whose district takes in much of the county's growth areas, recalled that when he first became a Placer County Water Agency director in 1973 as part of his duties as a member of the county Board of Supervisors, efforts were being directed at building a dam in the canyon.

While the closure of the diversion tunnel represents a current change in direction, the work has been undertaken with the idea that the tunnel could one day be re-opened as part of a revived Auburn dam project.

Lee said that the project makes a statement on the agency's commitment to provide a stable supply of good-quality water.

But the new construction will also produce recreational benefits by opening up a stretch of the river closed for more than three decades.

"It's a man-made marvel," Lee said. "We're not only getting our pumps back on a permanent basis but the recreational aspect is a benefit."

The Journal's Gus Thomson can be reached at gust@goldcountrymedia.com, or post a comment at auburnjournal.com.



April 11, 2008

Kimberly D. Bose, Secretary
Federal Energy Regulatory Commission
888 First Street, N.E., Room 1A
Washington, DC 20426

Re: Middle Fork American River Project, FERC No. 2079-061

Dear Secretary Bose:

Protect American River Canyons (PARC) wishes to raise two concerns for consideration when preparing the environmental impact statement during the relicensing of the Placer County Water Agency's Middle Fork American River Project.

1. Replacement of Greenwood Bridge over Middle Fork of the American River

The Middle Fork American River Project (Project) is responsible for the loss of the Greenwood Bridge over the Middle Fork of the American River. This occurred when the Project's partially completed Hell Hole Dam broke during December 1964. The resulting wave of water and debris caused by the dam's failure took out the Greenwood Bridge located on Driver's Flat Road connecting Placer County and El Dorado County near Ruck-A-Chucky rapids.

At the time the bridge was not replaced because Congress was considering construction of a dam on the North Fork downstream near the City of Auburn. Nine months later in September 1965 the legislation authorizing Auburn Dam was signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson. The bridge would have been buried under the reservoir's water if the dam had been completed.

Replacing the bridge would have occurred in the 1960's except for the authorization of Auburn Dam. Construction on Auburn Dam stopped in the late 1970's due to earthquake safety issues, and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation has indicated it has no plans to complete the dam. It is now time to consider replacing the bridge destroyed by the construction of the Middle Fork American River Project. The environmental, land use, fire management, recreational, and socio-economic impacts associated with replacing the bridge should be evaluated.

2. Removal of Concrete and Steel Bridge Debris from River

The Middle Fork American River Project (Project) is responsible for the loss of the State Highway 49 Bridge over the North Fork of the American River just downstream of the confluence of the North and Middle Forks. This occurred when the Project's partially completed

Hell Hole Dam broke during December 1964. The resulting wave of water and debris caused by the dam's failure took out the bridge between Placer County and El Dorado County.

A new bridge was built, but the concrete and steel debris from the destroyed bridge has remained in the river. The bridge debris was not removed from the river because in September 1965 legislation authorizing Auburn Dam was signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson. The debris in the river would have been buried under the reservoir's water and therefore was not removed. Construction on Auburn Dam stopped in the late 1970's due to earthquake safety issues, and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation has indicated it has no plans to complete the dam.

In 1974 the flow of the North Fork American River was diverted into a bypass tunnel to allow the dam's construction. This diversion ended in September 2007 when the river was returned to its original channel. As a result of the closure of the bypass tunnel and re-watering of the river channel, a four mile stretch of river that had been closed to public use for more than thirty years has now been re-opened for recreational boating. The concrete and steel bridge debris presents a hazard to people navigating the river, and also constitutes a visual blight on a section of river found eligible for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic River System by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation in January 1993.

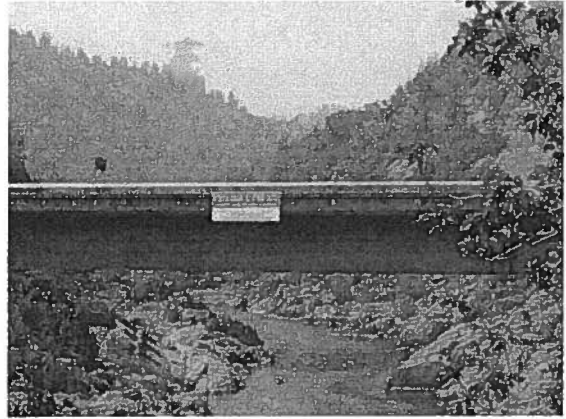
The environmental and public safety impacts of the abandoned concrete and steel bridge debris should be evaluated. PARC believes it is now time to remove that debris, and that it would be appropriate to formulate plans for removal in the current relicensing process.

Sincerely,

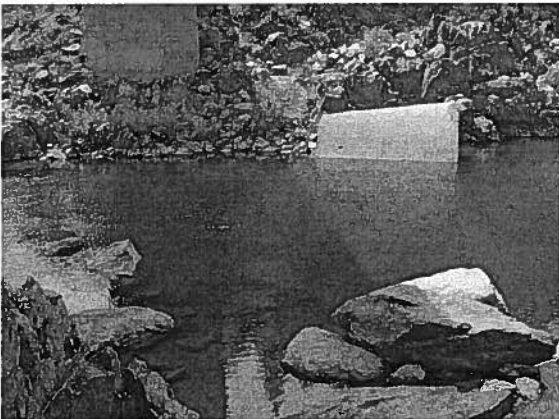
Timothy Woodall
President
Protect American River Canyons
P.O. Box 9312
Auburn, CA 95604
(530) 888-1100



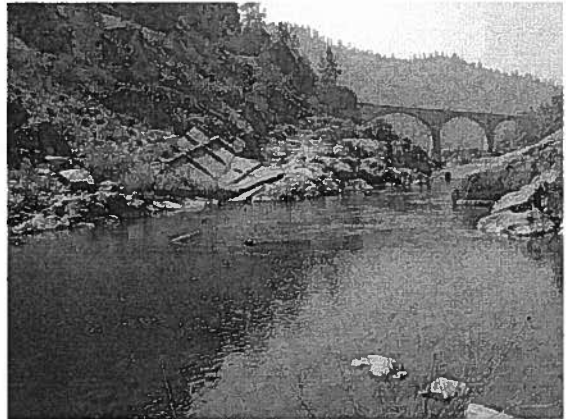
Auburn State Recreation Area sign warning of hazardous debris downstream (Confluence put-in)



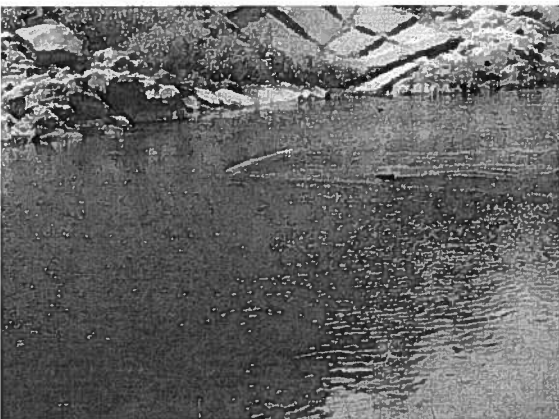
Highway 49 Bridge with a similar warning sign (Confluence)



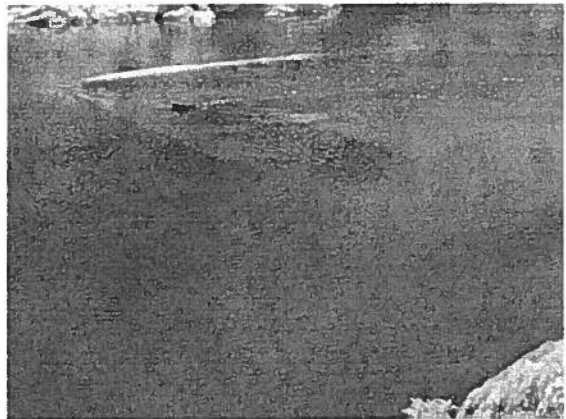
Debris on bank at existing bridge piling, low flows



Debris on bank and steel debris in River, low flows



Bridge Steel in River, low flows



Bridge Steel in River, low flows