

ORIGINAL Placer County Water Agency

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A Public Agency

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October 5, 2005

Office of the Secretary
Federal Energy Regulatory Commission
888 First Street, Northeast
Washington, D. C. 20426

Subject: FERC Project No. 2079, Middle Fork American River Project
Environmental Inspection Follow-Up Matters

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FEDERAL ENERGY
REGULATORY COMMISSION

Dear Sir or Madam:

The purpose of this letter is to reply to the letter dated August 16, 2005 from George H. Taylor, Chief, Biological Resources Branch, Division of Hydropower Administration and Compliance, with our responses to the items noted in his letter. These items resulted from the Environmental Inspection of the Project completed by Philip Scordelis, staff fishery biologist, on July 20-21, 2005. The items requiring our attention were grouped under the headings, "Hell Hole Reservoir", and "French Meadows Reservoir." The items are listed under the same headings below with our responses in italics.

Hell Hole Reservoir

Several of the stones used to construct the stairs at the Hell Hole Reservoir Overlook were loose and posed a tripping hazard. These stones should be grouted back into place. Additionally, the material used to effect earlier repairs to the stairs, which appears to be a caulking compound, created a harsh contrast to the original mortar; this should be removed and replaced with a material similar to the original grout. Please provide us with your schedule to complete this work.

The Hell Hole Reservoir recreation facilities are located in Eldorado National Forest (ENF). The operation and maintenance of these Middle Fork American River Project (the "Project") recreation facilities are performed by ENF under an agreement between Placer County Water Agency (the Agency) and ENF. On September 26, 2005, we met with representative of ENF to talk about the plan for future operation and maintenance of the Project recreation facilities and to review the items noted during the environmental inspection. At this meeting the ENF representatives told us they would make the requested repairs to the stairs by the end of October, 2005.

The panoramic display at the overlook has weathered and is no longer fully legible. A schedule to replace the display is needed.

ENF representatives notified us the panoramic display will be replaced by the end of May, 2006.

Those campsites at the Big Meadows Campground located within the archaeological area have not been upgraded, although you reported the required survey has been funded. Information on the cause of the delay and the schedule to complete the upgrades is required.

ENF cultural resources staff prepared a study plan that was submitted to the California State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO) in August, 2004. The study plan is still at SHPO awaiting their review. A large work backlog, lack of qualified staff, and higher priority projects have prevented SHPO from reviewing the study plan. Before upgrades can be made to the campsites within the archaeological area, ENF and SHPO must reach agreement on the required study plan and memorialize the agreement in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Then ENF will contract for the necessary archaeological testing, evaluation and documentation that must be completed before planned improvements are made. ENF will also prepare an environmental analysis for the planned improvements.

Presently, ENF and we are working on the assumption that the following will be accomplished by the end of 2006:

- *SHPO will review the study plan*
- *SHPO and ENF will reach agreement on a study plan which will be memorialized in an MOU*
- *Archaeological testing, evaluation and documentation will be completed*

Upgrading will then occur in two phases: Phase 1 in 2007 and Phase 2 in 2008. Phase 1 will consist of the following improvements:

- *The original vault toilet restrooms will be replaced with modern, handicapped accessible vault toilet buildings.*
- *The non-handicapped accessible flush toilet building on the East side will be replaced with a modern, handicapped accessible flush toilet building.*
- *Seven water faucets will be replaced and brought up to current standards and made handicapped accessible.*

Phase 2 will consist of the following improvements:

- *Rehabilitate remaining campsite parking spurs*
- *Replace and install parking barriers as needed*

Grass has grown around the fire ring at the Hell Hole Family Campground site closest to the lake (site number not observed). The grass should be cut immediately to eliminate the potential for a wildfire.

The grass was cut.

French Meadows Reservoir

The planks that provide a crossing of the ephemeral stream at the French Meadows Day-Use Area are worn, out of position, and have several large protruding nails. A plan and schedule to improve this crossing is required.

The French Meadows Reservoir recreation facilities are located in Tahoe National Forest (TNF). The operation and maintenance of these Project recreation facilities are performed by TNF under an agreement between the Agency and TNF. In a letter dated September 4, 2005 from Jan Cutts, District Ranger for the American River Ranger District, Ms. Cutts wrote: "The boards that cross the ephemeral stream will be removed by October 30, 2005. This structure is not an approved Forest Service design. The boards have created a dam holding back the larger boulders and gravel. The large boulders will be removed for safe crossing. If a foot-traffic crossing structure is needed we will utilize our Best Management Practices Guidelines for a stream crossing with an approved Forest Service design."

The abandoned information kiosk at the new RV sanitary dump poses both a health and safety hazard. A plan and schedule to remove this facility is needed if there are no plans to refurbish it.

In the previously mentioned letter, Ms. Cutts wrote: "The Forest Service has no desire to restore or maintain the building and will prepare a plan to have it removed by August 2006."

Snow loading has damaged the gate that prevents vehicles from entering the prohibited area at the Prairie Wolf Group Campsite. A schedule to repair or replace this gate is needed.

In the previously mentioned letter, Ms. Cutts wrote: "The Forest Service will remove this gate by October 30, 2005. Rock barriers will be set in place to prevent vehicle access into the group area or the Forest Service will replaced the gate with a new one by August 2006."

Grass has grown around the fire ring at Site 37 in the Lewis Family Campground. This grass should also be cut immediately.

In the previously mentioned letter, Ms. Cutts wrote: "The concrete grill and fire ring were removed August 8, 2005 and replaced with a fire ring and adjustable

grill combination. A 5-foot diameter fire clearance to mineral soil was completed."

Not all sites at the Lewis Family Campground have bear-proof food lockers. A camper reported that a bear had entered their vehicle to access to food in an ice chest. A schedule to provide bear-proof food lockers at sites in this campground is required.

In the previously mentioned letter, Ms. Cutts wrote: "Containers were installed August 30, 2005 for campsites 1-27. This was accomplished using funding from PCWA to the Forest Service through the 2005 Collection Agreement Operating Plan. Campsites 28-40 will be completed by August 15, 2006."

The McGuire Point Day-Use Area continues to be a concern, as problems noted during the 2000 Environmental Inspection persist. Trails to access the individual day-use sites are either non-existent or severely overgrown, the legs of one picnic table had sunk into the ground, the informational sign at one entrance was demolished and lying on the ground, multiple piles of cleared brush have been left lying on the ground throughout the area, and vegetation around the cooking stoves is tall enough to pose a wildfire threat, should anyone attempt to use the area. This day-use area must receive immediate attention to bring it up to standards typical for Commission-approved facilities. You must notify us by the due date described below that:

- The area has been brushed so that trails to all day-use sites are clearly delineated, and that all vegetation near the cooking stoves has been cleared.
- All picnic tables are properly set, with table tops at the correct height and all tables level.
- The informational sign has been replaced.
- All brush piles have been burned in place or physically removed from the area.

In the previously mentioned letter, Ms. Cutts wrote: "The following maintenance items were completed on August 31, 2005:

- a. All (ten) picnic sites have been cleared of flammable vegetation to mineral soil around the tables and grills for a 10-foot radius.*
- b. The picnic tables have been repainted, leveled, and adjusted to the proper height per Forest Service specifications.*
- c. A new information/bulletin board (kiosk) has been installed and the old one removed.*
- d. The Forest Service will burn the brush piles in the fall within the burn prescription. The piles are on the Forest Service Burn Plan to be completed when the moisture conditions are within prescription. Forest Service will notify PCWA when the piles are burned. The goal is to accomplish this by November 15, 2005, depending on weather conditions."*

You mentioned the possible conversion of this day-use area to a group campground. Before any conversion is undertaken you must file to amend the approved Recreation Plan, but the above deficiencies must be completed first, as required recreation facilities

must be adequately maintained and available for public use until the amendment is approved. Your application should include the following:

- Use data that show the need for another group campground at French Meadows Reservoir.
- Design drawings for the proposed group campground.
- Evidence of consultation with the U. S. Forest Service and the California State Historic Preservation Officer.

In the previously mentioned letter, Ms. Cutts wrote: "The Forest Service does not have the use figures to justify converting this facility from a picnic area to a group campground by 2007. The Forest Service will remove this funding request proposed in the 2007 Collection Agreement Operating Plan. Before the Forest Service requests funding for future expansion for a group site, use figures will be provided to PCWA to justify the need."

We greatly value our good working relationship with both national forests and we appreciate the knowledge and experience they bring to the operation and maintenance of the Project recreation facilities. Please call me at (530) 885-6917 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Stephen J. Jones
Power System Manager

cc: David A. Breninger
Philip Scordelis
Edward J. Tiedemann