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7.12 CULTURAL RESOURCES AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

This section describes the cultural resources in the vicinity of the Middle Fork American River Project (MFP or Project).

Placer County Water Agency (PCWA) has conducted investigations to identify cultural resources and evaluate their historical significance according to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) eligibility criteria. Additionally, PCWA has consulted with Native American Tribes and other stakeholders to identify cultural resources that are considered by them to be culturally important, even though the resources may not meet NRHP eligibility standards. Cultural resources include any prehistoric or historic object, site, district, structure or building created or modified by human activity. Cultural resources that qualify for listing in the NRHP are designated as historic properties. Preservation of historic properties must be taken into consideration by Federal agencies prior to taking a federal action, such as issuing a new license for the MFP.

Information that identifies the location of cultural resources is considered privileged information (confidential) and therefore is not provided in this section. Privileged information, including site-specific descriptions and impact analyses for the cultural resources in the vicinity of the MFP can be found in the Cultural Resources Technical Study Reports (TSR) (PCWA 2010a, 2010b, 2010c; Supporting Document [SD] D) and Historic Properties Management Plan (HPMP) (PCWA 2010d; SD E). These supporting documents containing privileged information will not be made available to the public or posted on the Internet.

7.12.1 Information Sources

Information for this section is primarily derived from reports developed by PCWA, which: (1) identify cultural resources in the vicinity of the MFP; and (2) evaluate their historical significance according to NRHP eligibility criteria. In addition, identification of resources potentially affected by operations and maintenance of the MFP, their cultural and historical significance, and management measures for their conservation are summarized and described in the HPMP.

PCWA conducted cultural resource inventory studies for the relicensing of the MFP in two phases. Phase 1 was initiated in 2005 and included a records search and literature review to identify previously known cultural resources located within or near the vicinity of the MFP. Phase 2 was conducted in 2006 through 2008 and consisted of field surveys focused on two activities: (1) verifying the location and conditions of known cultural resources; and (2) identifying and recording previously unknown cultural resources. The cultural resources inventory study methods and findings are documented in the following reports, which are located in SD D:

- 2005 Cultural Resources Inventory Study Report (PCWA 2006);
- 2006 Cultural Resources Inventory Study Report (PCWA 2007);

- CUL 1 – Cultural Resources TSR – 2007 (PCWA 2010a; SD B); and
- CUL 1 – Cultural Resources TSR – 2008 (PCWA 2010b; SD B).

Following the identification of resources, PCWA conducted a NRHP-eligibility study in 2008 and 2009. The eligibility study focused on 17 cultural resources identified through the inventory studies that could be affected by: (1) Project operation and maintenance activities; or (2) construction, operation, and/or maintenance of Project improvements. NRHP eligibility methods and findings are documented in the following report located in SD D:

- CUL 1 – Cultural Resources National Register of Historic Places Eligibility Report (PCWA 2010c; SD D).

7.12.1.1 Determination of Area of Potential Effect

In accordance with 36 CFR § 800.2(c)(4), PCWA requested that the FERC authorize PCWA to initiate consultation on the Commission's behalf with the California State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) regarding the relicensing of the MFP. By a letter dated March 3, 2008, the FERC designated PCWA as its non-federal representative for purposes of Section 106 consultation under the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). Pursuant to Section 106, and as the Commission's designated non-federal representative, PCWA consulted with the SHPO, Native American Tribes, and other stakeholders to locate, determine NRHP eligibility, and assess potential adverse effects to cultural resources associated with the Project.

The Area of Potential Effect (APE) is the geographic area within which an undertaking may directly or indirectly cause alterations in the character or use of NRHP-eligible sites (36 CFR § 800.16[d]). For the purposes of the MFP relicensing, the APE comprises all lands within the existing FERC Project boundary and within a 200-foot area surrounding any: (1) Project facility or feature; (2) Project recreation facility or feature; or (3) proposed facility or feature, or disturbance area (e.g., construction and staging areas), associated with the Hell Hole Seasonal Storage Increase Improvement.

With a few exceptions, the APE does not include lands above any tunnels because the tunnels are situated tens to hundreds of feet underground and no ground-disturbing activities associated with the Project will occur in these areas. However, the tunnels occasionally surface due to topographic conditions, for example, at the Long Canyon Crossing Removable Section. In addition, tunnel vents and surge tanks are located at the surface. These areas, and any other areas where the tunnels or associated features surface, are included in the APE. In addition, the tunnel entrance and exit points are included in the APE because they coincide with aboveground features such as reservoirs, penstocks, and powerhouses.

In a letter dated February 23, 2010, pursuant to 36 CFR § 800.4(a)(1), SHPO concurred with the narrative and graphic descriptions of the APE submitted by PCWA on December 16, 2009.

7.12.2 Findings

The following describes the history of human occupation and settlement in the northern Sierra Nevada in the vicinity of the MFP, and the cultural resources associated with the MFP.

7.12.2.1 Human History

The archaeological record for the northern Sierra Nevada and Lake Tahoe Basin postulates more than 8,000 years of Native American occupation in the region. The upper reaches of the Middle Fork American River and Rubicon River lies within the ethnographic territory of two indigenous Native American groups, the Hill Nisenan (Southern Maidu) and Washoe. The crest of the Sierra Nevada served as a dividing line between their territories, with the Nisenan to the west and the Washoe to the east. Linguistically distinct groups, their territories overlapped in the vicinity of the MFP.

Nisenan inhabited the drainages of the Yuba, Bear, and American rivers, and also the lower reaches of the Feather River, extending from the east banks of the Sacramento River on the west to the mid to high elevations of the western flank of the Sierra Nevada (Wilson and Towne 1978). Washoe historically inhabited the region east of the crest of the Sierra Nevada into Carson Valley, extending from the Walker River in the south to Honey Lake in the north, with peripheral territory extending to the mid-elevations of the west Sierran slope (d'Azevedo 1986). The two ethnographic groups fully exploited their territories by following a pattern of seasonal transhumance, acquiring different resources across a range of elevations and environments.

The first Euroamericans to make contact with Native Americans in the vicinity of the MFP were either Spanish explorers or mountain men trapping in and exploring the region. Spanish exploration of the Central Valley did not begin until the late 1700s, and the eastern edges of the Central Valley and the Sierra Nevada were not explored until the early 1800s. Early explorations of the Sierra Nevada and its flanks were soon followed by groups of Euroamerican immigrants moving west.

The hub of non-Native American settlement in the 1840s was Sutter's Fort on the Sacramento River. Somewhat closer to the study area was a cluster of ranches on the Bear River, just north of the area now encompassed by the town of Wheatland. California's gold rush began with the discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill on the American River in 1848. By 1849, the gold discovery ignited a worldwide frenzy, as "forty-niners" dashed to the California gold country. The rush lasted only a few years, but it brought a major influx of people to California.

Early arrivals to the gold fields began prospecting in placer deposits in and along rivers and streams, which were easily accessible. Beginning in the 1850s, mining activity included the construction of dams, water ditches, and flumes to drain rivers and expose their beds for mining. Eventually, the surface placers became depleted, and it was necessary to access deeper gold deposits in streambeds and other areas. These deposits were initially accessed by drift mining, which involved the excavation of shafts

and tunnels into auriferous gravels, and later by hydraulic mining. The environmental impacts associated with hydraulic mining eventually led to an injunction against the practice in 1884, and the subsequent banning of hydraulic mining. However, hydraulic mining and its associated ditch and water conveyance systems facilitated the development of hydroelectric systems in the Sierra Nevada.

7.12.2.2 Cultural Resources

Cultural resources present in the APE include: Native American archaeological sites; historic buildings, structures, objects, and sites; and isolated artifacts. The cultural resources inventory studies identified a total of 34 cultural resources within the Project's APE. As stated above, of those 34 cultural resources, the NRHP-Eligibility Report focused on 17 cultural resources that could be affected by Project operation and maintenance; or construction, operation, and/or maintenance of proposed Project improvements. Three of these resources were previously evaluated for inclusion on the NRHP by the United States Department of Agriculture-Forest Service (USDA-FS). The remaining 14 cultural resources were evaluated for inclusion on the NRHP by PCWA. A total of four resources are recommended eligible for inclusions on the NRHP based on the analyses completed by the USDA-FS and PCWA. These four prehistoric resources include:

- A large milling station feature with numerous mortar cups, and a flake scatter. This site was evaluated by the USDA-FS and was determined to be eligible for inclusion on the NRHP. SHPO concurrence is pending.
- A large seasonal habitation site, with three loci, each containing bedrock milling features and lithic scatters. The site also contains rock art, midden, and numerous groundstone artifacts. This site was evaluated by the USDA-FS and was determined to be eligible for inclusion on the NRHP. The SHPO concurred with this determination.
- A bedrock milling station with two mortars, a lithic scatter, and projectile points. This site was evaluated by PCWA and was recommended eligible for inclusion on the NRHP because it has the potential to yield important information regarding regional prehistory. SHPO concurrence is pending.
- A site consisting of multiple panels of petroglyphs inscribed on two large rocks. This site was evaluated by PCWA and was recommended eligible for inclusion on the NRHP. SHPO concurrence is pending.

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