



United States Department of the Interior



FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Sacramento Fish and Wildlife Office
2800 Cottage Way, Room W-2605
Sacramento, California 95825-1846

In Reply Refer To:
81420-2008-TA-0986-1

MAR 27 2008

Mr. Mal Toy
Director of Resource Development
Placer County Water Agency
P.O. Box 6570
Auburn, California 95604

Subject: Review of California Red-Legged Frog Site Assessment for the
Middle Fork American River Project (FERC No. 2079), Placer County,
California.

Dear Mr. Toy:

This is in response to the February 19, 2008, *California Red-legged Frog Site Assessment Report* that was submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) for review. Placer County Water Agency is in the process of obtaining a new license to operate the existing hydroelectric power generation project along the Middle Fork of the American River, Placer County, California. At issue are the potential effects of the project on the threatened California red-legged frog (*Rana aurora draytonii*) (frog). This letter is issued under the authority of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*).

The nearest known California red-legged frog population is approximately 2 miles north of the project near Michigan Bluff, California, and an additional known frog occurrence is located within 1 mile of the project boundary on Ralston Ridge. Because no frogs have been identified as occupying the Ralston Ridge site in the years following its 2001 discovery, it is possible that this site represents dispersal habitat for the frog. Searches of areas surrounding the Ralston Ridge site have not located a source California red-legged frog population. Given the lack of barriers between Ralston Ridge and Michigan Bluff, the individual located in 2001 could have dispersed from the known Michigan Bluff population. A frog dispersing from the Michigan Bluff site to Ralston Ridge would cross the Middle Fork of the American River in a reach affected by this proposed project. Therefore, the Service concludes this project may affect this listed species.

Furthermore, in order to adequately assess the effects of the project on the frog, additional areas of suitable habitat should be surveyed for this listed species. While no frogs have been detected at Ralston Pond since 2001, the pond was last surveyed in 2004. Since 2001, no protocol level surveys have been conducted at this site. Because the Ralston Ridge pond appears to provide

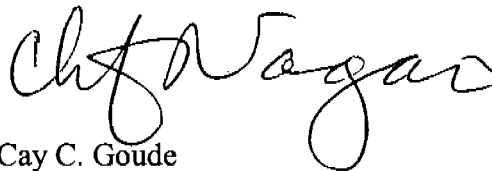

TAKE PRIDE
IN AMERICA 

suitable habitat for the California red-legged frog, we recommend protocol level surveys of this aquatic feature be conducted following the Service's 2005, *Revised Guidance on Site Assessment and Field Surveys for the California Red-legged Frog* (Guidelines), and the results of these surveys be submitted to the Service for review

The area identified in the site assessment as Horseshoe Bar contains suitable breeding habitat for the California red-legged frog. Given that Horseshoe bar is located approximately 2.8 miles from the known Michigan Bluff frog population, is within the same watershed, and maintains connectivity with the known population, it is probable that the ponds at Horseshoe Bar contain this listed frog. Therefore since three ponds located at Horseshoe Bar (ponds C, E, and F) appear to provide suitable breeding habitat for the frog, we recommend protocol level surveys of these aquatic features be conducted following the Service's 2005, Guidelines. Since the Horseshoe Bar ponds are located on private property, we understand that access to conduct surveys may be an issue. If permission to conduct surveys is not granted, based on connectivity with, and proximately to, a known frog population, Placer County Water Agency should assume presence of this listed amphibian and analyze the effects that the proposed project may have on a California red-legged frog population at Horseshoe Bar.

Please address any questions or concerns regarding this response on the Middle Fork American River Project to Jeremiah Karuzas, or Amy Fesnock, acting Forest and Foothills Branch Chief, at (916) 414-6600.

Sincerely,


 Cay C. Goude
Assistant Field Supervisor

cc:

Service List – Middle Fork American River Project