

# **Placer County Water Agency Middle Fork American River Project (FERC Project No. 2079)**

## **VISUAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN**



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February 2011

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**List of Acronyms**

BLM	Bureau of Land Management
CDFG	California State Department of Fish and Game
CSP	California State Parks
ENF	Eldorado National Forest
FERC	Federal Energy Regulatory Commission
LRMP	Land and Resource Management Plan
MFP	Middle Fork American River Project
NFS	National Forest Service
NPS	National Park Service
PCWA	Placer County Water Agency
Project	Middle Fork American River Project
TNF	Tahoe National Forest
USBOR	United States Bureau of Reclamation
USDA-FS	United States Department of Agriculture-Forest Service
USDI	United States Department of the Interior
VRMP	Visual Resource Management Plan
VRPP	Visual Resource Protection Plan

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This Visual Resource Management Plan (VRMP) was developed by the Placer County Water Agency (PCWA) in association with the relicensing of the Middle Fork American River Project (MFP or Project). The measures contained in this plan are based primarily on comments provided by the following resource agencies in a letter dated December 20, 2010: United States Department of Agriculture-Forest Service (USDA-FS), United States Department of the Interior (USDI) – Bureau of Land Management (BLM), USDI National Park Service (NPS), United States Bureau of Reclamation (USBOR), California State Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), and California State Parks (CSP).

This VRMP addresses all existing MFP facilities and any new facilities or modifications to existing facilities that would occur over the term of the new license. The existing MFP facilities are described in detail in Section 3.0 of PCWA's Application for License (PCWA 2011). Modifications to existing facilities and proposed new facilities are described in Section 4.0 of PCWA's License Application (PCWA 2011).

The information contained in this VRMP is organized as follows:

- Purpose of the VRMP;
- Measures Related to Existing MFP Facilities;
- Measures Related to Modification of Existing MFP Facilities or Construction of New MFP Facilities;
- Roles and Responsibilities;
- Periodic Visual Condition Assessments;
- Implementation Schedule;
- Annual Coordination Meetings;
- Periodic Updates to the VRMP; and
- Literature Cited.

## 2.0 PURPOSE OF THE VRMP

The purpose of this VRMP is to identify and describe the measures that PCWA will implement over the term of the new license to maintain or improve the existing visual condition of select MFP facilities with respect to USDA-FS objectives, standards, and guidelines. In addition, this VRMP describes how PCWA will consult and coordinate with the USDA-FS when implementing future projects that have the potential to affect visual resources on National Forest Service (NFS) lands, including modification of existing MFP facilities or the construction of new MFP facilities.

### **3.0 MEASURES RELATED TO EXISTING MFP FACILITIES**

This section identifies the specific measures that PCWA will implement to help improve the existing visual condition of select existing MFP facilities with respect to USDA-FS standards and guidelines. The existing Project facilities are located primarily on public lands managed by the USDA-FS Eldorado National Forest (ENF) and Tahoe National Forest (TNF). Therefore, the discussion is organized by ENF and TNF.

#### **3.1 ELDORADO NATIONAL FOREST (ENF)**

PCWA will implement the following measures identified by the resources agencies at the existing MFP facilities located in the ENF.

##### **Hell Hole – Middle Fork Tunnel Gatehouse**

Within three years of license issuance, PCWA will paint the Hell Hole – Middle Fork Tunnel Gatehouse at Hell Hole Reservoir dark gray. The specific shade of dark gray will be selected in consultation with, and approved by, the USDA-FS.

##### **French Meadows Powerhouse**

When next painted, PCWA will paint the French Meadows Powerhouse and penstock a color selected in consultation with, and approved by, the USDA-FS.

##### **Operator Cottages and Shop**

Within three years of license issuance, PCWA will paint the Operators Cottages and Shop at Hell Hole reservoir a dark color. The specific color will be selected in consultation with, and approved by, the USDA-FS.

##### **Hell Hole Dormitory Facility**

During the course of normal maintenance, PCWA will replace the Hell Hole Dormitory roof with a roof that is dark in color. The specific color will be selected in consultation with, and approved by, the USDA-FS.

##### **South Fork Long Canyon Diversion Dam**

The existing South Fork Long Canyon Diversion Dam includes railings, which are currently painted yellow for safety reasons. Under the Proposed Action, the South Fork Long Canyon Creek Diversion Dam will be modified to increase natural sediment delivery and transport of bedload and fine material downstream. As part of the dam modification, PCWA will paint the safety railings a color other than yellow, provided the change in color meets all appropriate safety regulations. The color will be selected in consultation with an ENF landscape architect, and submitted to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) for approval. Upon approval by the FERC, the safety railing will be painted as part of the dam modification, which is scheduled to occur three to four years after license issuance.

## **Middle Fork – Ralston Tunnel Surge Shaft, Tank and Storage Building**

During the course of normal maintenance PCWA will:

- Replace the galvanized fencing that currently encloses these features with black plastisol fencing;
- Relocate unconsolidated items stored within the fenceline of the facility in a neat manner and placed as out-of-site as possible when viewed from Forest Road 14N25;
- When next painted, paint metal components (other than the tank) matte black.
- When next painted, paint the storage building doors a dark brown color that complements the brick color.
- When next painted, PCWA will paint the Storage Building a color that blends with the surrounding landscape. The paint color will be selected in consultation with, and approved by, the USDA-FS.

### **Ralston Powerhouse Butterfly Valve House**

Within three years of license issuance, PCWA will paint the Ralston Powerhouse Butterfly Valve House a dark color which blends with the surrounding vegetation. The specific paint color will be selected in consultation with, and approved by, the USDA-FS.

### **Ralston Powerhouse**

Within three years of license issuance, PCWA will paint all non-mechanical, non-electrical, and non-hydraulic components associated with the Ralston Powerhouse the same dark green color that is currently on the powerhouse gates.

### **Passive Microwave Reflector Station above Ralston Afterbay**

Within five years of license issuance, PCWA will paint the Ralston Powerhouse microwave reflector a color that will blend with the surrounding vegetation, provided it will not impede with its communication function. The paint color will be selected in consultation with and approved by, the USDA-FS.

### **Ralston Ridge Sediment Disposal Area**

If over the term of the license, materials other than soil that are stored at the Ralston Ridge Sediment Disposal Area, then they will be stored in a neat, consolidated manner and placed as out-of-site as possible when viewed from Forest Road 14N25.

## **3.2 TAHOE NATIONAL FOREST (TNF)**

PCWA will implement the following measures identified by the resources agencies at the existing MFP facilities located in the TNF.

## **French Meadows – Hell Hole Tunnel Gatehouse**

Within five years of license issuance, PCWA will paint the French Meadows – Hell Hole Tunnel Gatehouse, which is visible from French Meadows Reservoir, in a manner to blend with the surrounding vegetation. The specific color will be selected in consultation with, and approved by, the USDA-FS.

## **French Meadows Dam Staging Area**

Within one year of license issuance, PCWA will develop a Landscape Rehabilitation Plan for the French Meadows Dam Staging Area. The plan will address restoration of the spoil-pile character of this facility and will help to reduce visual impacts. The Landscape Rehabilitation Plan will address re-grading portions of the site to natural contours and introducing vegetation to reduce the scale and contrast of the staging area when viewed from the Mosquito Ridge Road (FR 96), consistent with use of the staging area for Project activities. PCWA will implement the plan within five years of approval of the plan by the USDA-FS and the FERC.

## **French Meadows Dam Generator Building**

When next painted, PCWA will paint the French Meadows Dam Generator Building a color that blends with the surrounding landscape. The paint color will be selected in consultation with, and approved by, the USDA-FS.

## **Ralston Afterbay Dam Generator Building**

When next painted, PCWA will paint the Ralston Dam Generator Building a color that blends with the surrounding landscape. The paint color will be selected in consultation with, and approved by, the USDA-FS.

## **4.0 MEASURES RELATED TO MODIFICATION OF EXISTING MFP FACILITIES OR CONSTRUCTION OF NEW MFP FACILITIES**

During the term of the new FERC license, changes to the MFP infrastructure, including modifications to existing MFP facilities and new facility construction (e.g., the Hell Hole Seasonal Storage Increase), may necessitate additional actions to protect, enhance, or mitigate existing visual resources. PCWA will develop project-specific Visual Resource Protection Plan (VRPP) for any new, relocated, or significantly modified MFP facility or other Project-related disturbance that has the potential to affect visual resources on NFS lands on an as-needed basis as determined through consultation with the USDA-FS. This process is described in the following subsections.

### **4.1 VRPP REQUIREMENTS**

PCWA will develop a VRPP prior to implementing any action that has the potential to affect the overall visual quality of NFS lands. The VRPP will be developed in consultation with the USDA-FS and will identify specific measures that will be implemented to help: (1) bring the proposed facility into compliance with visual resource standards and guidelines contained in the ENF Land and Resource Management Plan

(LRMP) (USDA-FS 1988) and the TNF LRMP (USDA-FS 1990), where feasible; and/or (2) minimize impacts to visual resources on NFS lands. Mitigation measures identified in the project-specific VRMPs may include, but are not limited to: (1) surface treatments with USDA-FS-approved colors and natural appearing materials that will be in harmony with the surrounding landscape; (2) use of non-specular conductors for the transmission lines; (3) use of native plant species to screen facilities from view; (4) reshaping and revegetating disturbed areas to blend with surrounding visual characteristics; and (5) locating transmission facilities to minimize visual impacts.

At a minimum, the VRPP will include:

- A description of the planned action with respect to the standards and guidelines contained in the ENF or TNF LRMPs, as appropriate;
- Appropriate protection, mitigation, and enhancement measures that will be implemented;
- A schedule for implementation of appropriate measures; and
- A record of consultation with the USDA-FS regarding the modification and appropriate visual measures.

#### **4.2 VRPP DEVELOPMENT PROCESS**

PCWA will implement the following process prior to initiating MFP-related actions that may affect visual resources on NFS lands. This process assumes a plan/design for any potential action has already been developed.

- Notify the USDA-FS of the planned action and identify any potential impacts to the existing visual environment of the Project area;
- If determined by the USDA-FS that a VRPP is required, develop a draft VRPP that identifies the actions that will be taken to protect, enhance, and/or mitigate the visual resources impacted by the planned action;
- Provide a draft VRPP to the USDA-FS for a 30-day review and comment period;
- Revise and finalize the VRPP, based on comments provided by the USDA-FS;
- Submit a final VRPP to the USDA-FS for review, requesting USDA-FS approval within 30-days of receipt of the revised plan; and
- Upon written approval from the USDA-FS, file the final VRPP with FERC, along with documentation of consultation with the USDA-FS.

For Project actions that the USDA-FS deems not substantial enough to warrant the development of a VRPP, the following process shall be followed:

- Provide the USDA-FS with a narrative, drawings and/or photographs of the planned action for a 30-day review and comment period;
- Acquire documented approval of modifications by the USDA-FS; and
- Upon written approval from the USDA-FS, file the drawings/or photographs of the planned modifications with FERC, along with documentation of consultation with the USDA-FS.

## **5.0 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

This section describes PCWA's and the USDA-FS roles and responsibilities related to implementation of this VRMP.

### **5.1 PCWA'S ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

PCWA will be responsible for the following activities:

- Implementing the measures outlined in this VRMP following FERC approval;
- Coordinating VRMP implementation actions with other MFP resource management plans or actions;
- Reviewing potential visual resource changes over time;
- Ensuring that PCWA facility operations and maintenance staff are aware of the requirements of the VRMP so that they can help implement applicable actions;
- Repainting, touch-up, and routine maintenance as necessary to maintain the MFP facilities in good condition;
- Consulting with the USDA-FS regarding the need for a project-specific VRPP prior to implementing substantial MFP actions that could affect visual quality of NFS lands;
- Developing a project-specific VRPP, when necessary, and obtaining the appropriate approvals from the USDA-FS and FERC; and
- Implementing the measures outlined in the VRPP, when a VRPP is necessary.

### **5.2 USDA-FS ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

The USDA-FS will be responsible for following the following activities:

- Providing review and feedback on project-specific Draft VRPPs within the timeframes specified above;
- Provide review and feedback on the VRMP implementation actions, including approval of project-specific VRPPs within the timeframes specified above;

- Participate in annual coordination meetings; and
- If needed, review any updates to the VRMP within the timeframes specified in Section 4.2, prior to PCWA submittal to FERC for approval.

## **6.0 PERIODIC VISUAL CONDITION ASSESSMENTS**

Within two years of license issuance and every five years thereafter, PCWA will assess and document the visual condition of the MFP facilities. The condition assessment will be limited to the MFP facilities or features that can be seen from USDA-FS managed viewsheds. The condition assessment will primarily focus on documenting maintenance needs that relate to visual quality. The information developed as part of the condition assessment will be used to prioritize maintenance needs at MFP facilities or features that have the potential to affect visual quality on NFS lands. The visual condition assessment will be performed in the field, in consultation with the appropriate ENF and TNF landscape architects.

The existing condition of each facility will be documented on a standardized form, to be developed in consultation with the USDA-FS. In addition, the assessment results will be documented in a brief report. The report and forms will be submitted to the USDA-FS for a 30-day review and comment period. PCWA will revise the report based on comments provided by the USDA-FS, as appropriate. The assessment results will be discussed at the subsequent annual coordination meeting (described in Section 8.0). The information will be used to prioritize and schedule future maintenance needs.

## **7.0 IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE**

The activities described in this VRMP will be implemented in accordance with the schedule specified in the text of this plan.

## **8.0 ANNUAL COORDINATION MEETINGS**

Within one year of license issuance and every year thereafter, PCWA will schedule a meeting with the TNF and ENF to discuss the following topics:

- Review the measures outlined in this plan and the associated implementation schedule;
- Identify and review the measures implemented during the previous year;
- Review the results of the periodic visual condition assessment, if appropriate;
- Discuss priority maintenance needs and establish a schedule to address those needs;
- Identify the specific measures to be implemented during the upcoming year; and
- Discuss the need for any project-specific VRPPs.

The date of the meeting will be mutually agreed to by PCWA and the USDA-FS, but in general will be held within the first 60 days of each calendar year.

### **8.1 ANNUAL MEETING SUMMARY/PROGRESS REPORT**

PCWA will document the meeting discussions in the form of an Annual Meeting Summary/Progress Report. The Annual Meeting Summary/Progress Report will document the discussion and any agreements. PCWA will provide the USDA-FS with a draft version of the Annual Meeting Summary/Progress Report within two weeks of the meeting for a 30-day review and comment period. Comments provided to PCWA by the USDA-FS will be addressed in a final Annual Meeting Summary/Progress Report, as appropriate. Upon completion the Annual Meeting Summary/Progress will be filed with the FERC and distributed to the appropriate resource agencies.

### **9.0 PERIODIC UPDATES TO THE VRMP**

Beginning five years after license issuance, and every five years thereafter, PCWA will consult with the USDA-FS and other appropriate land management agencies to determine if modification of the VRMP is appropriate. Once agreement has been reached, PCWA will provide a draft version of the revised VRMP to the USDA-FS and other appropriate land management agencies for a 30-day review and comment period. Any comments provided by the land management agencies will be addressed, as appropriate, within 30 days of the close of the comment period. Upon completion of the review process, PCWA will file the Revised VRMP with FERC for approval, along with consultation documentation and any other pertinent information that supports the plan revisions. The Revised VRMP will become effective upon approval by FERC.

### **10.0 LITERATURE CITED**

Placer County Water Agency (PCWA). 2011. PCWA Middle Fork American River Project (FERC Project No. 2079) Application for New License. Volume 3, Exhibit E. February.

United States Department of Agriculture-Forest Service (USDA-FS). 1988. Eldorado National Forest. Land and Resource Management Plan. USDA Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region, San Francisco, CA.

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