



State Water Resources Control Board

November 29, 2021

Brad Arnold, General Manager
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Governor's Office of Planning & Research

Nov 30 2021

STATE CLEARINGHOUSE

COMMENTS ON SOUTH SUTTER WATER DISTRICT'S CAMP FAR WEST HYDROELECTRIC RELICENSING PROJECT DRAFT INITIAL STUDY AND MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION

Dear Brad Arnold:

On October 29, 2021, South Sutter Water District (SSWD) issued a draft Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND) for the Camp Far West Hydroelectric Relicensing Project (Proposed Project). SSWD owns and operates the Camp Far West Hydroelectric Project (Hydroelectric Project) and, as part of the Proposed Project, proposes to continue operating the Hydroelectric Project under a new 50-year license from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). In addition to continued operations, SSWD proposes five modifications or new components:

- Administrative modification of the FERC Hydroelectric Project boundary to add an area, including an existing road and remove lands not necessary for operation of the Proposed Project;
- Implementation of a new flow regime in the Bear River downstream of Camp Far West Dam;
- Implementation of environmental measures, including the *Bald Eagle Management Plan*, great blue heron (*Ardea herodias*) rookery management measure, *Recreation Facilities Plan*, and *Historic Properties Management Plan* (HPMP);
- An increase in the height of the Camp Far West Spillway by 5 feet to raise the maximum reservoir elevation of the Camp Far West Reservoir; and
- Recreation feature relocations and improvements.

SSWD is lead agency for the purpose of complying with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) is a CEQA responsible agency. State Water Board staff appreciates the opportunity to comment on the draft IS/MND and are providing comments in Attachment A.

E. JOAQUIN ESQUIVEL, CHAIR | EILEEN SOBECK, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

If you have questions regarding this letter, please contact Derek Wadsworth, Project Manager, in the Water Quality Certification Program of the Division of Water Rights, by email at derek.wadsworth@waterboards.ca.gov. Written correspondence should be directed to:

State Water Resources Control Board
Division of Water Rights – Water Quality Certification Program
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Sincerely,

Derek Wadsworth
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Water Quality Certification Program
Division of Water Rights

Attachment A – Comments on the Camp Far West Hydroelectric Relicensing Project
Draft Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration

ec (with enclosures):

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**ATTACHMENT A:
STATE WATER RESOURCE CONTROL BOARD STAFF
COMMENTS ON THE CAMP FAR WEST HYDROELECTRIC RELICENSING
PROJECT
DRAFT INITIAL STUDY AND MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION**

State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) staff are providing the following comments on South Sutter Water District's (SSWD) Camp Far West Hydroelectric Relicensing Project (Proposed Project) draft Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND).

General Comments

1. Section 401 of the Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C. § 1341) requires any applicant for a federal license or permit for an activity that may result in any discharge to navigable waters, to obtain certification from the State that the discharge will comply with the applicable water quality requirements, including the requirements of section 303 of the Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C. § 1313) for water quality standards and implementation plans. Clean Water Act section 401 directs that certifications shall prescribe effluent limitations and other conditions necessary to ensure compliance with the Clean Water Act and with any other appropriate requirements of state law, including the Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act (Wat. Code, § 13000 et seq.). Conditions of certification shall become a condition of any federal license or permit subject to certification. The Proposed Project will result in a discharge to navigable waters and must obtain certification from the State Water Board as part of relicensing for continued operations.

On May 17, 2021, SSWD submitted a certification application to the State Water Board for the Camp Far West Hydroelectric Project (Hydroelectric Project). SSWD's certification application is occurring as part of its proposed 50-year relicensing of the Hydroelectric Project through the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC; Project No. 2997).

The State Water Board's certification for the Hydroelectric Project relicensing must ensure compliance with applicable water quality standards in the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board's Water Quality Control Plan for the Sacramento River Basin and the San Joaquin River Basin (SR/SJR Basin Plan) (Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board 2018) and the Water Quality Control Plan for the San Francisco Bay/Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Estuary (Bay-Delta Plan) (State Water Board 2018), as they may be amended during the term of the new license. Water quality control plans designate the beneficial uses of water that are to be protected (such as municipal and industrial, agricultural, and fish and wildlife beneficial uses), water quality objectives for the reasonable protection of the beneficial uses and the prevention of nuisance, and a program of implementation to achieve the water quality objectives. (Wat. Code, §§ 13241, 13050, subds. (h), (j).) The beneficial uses, together with the water quality objectives contained in the water quality control

plans, and applicable state and federal anti-degradation requirements, constitute California's water quality standards for purposes of the Clean Water Act. In issuing water quality certification for a project, the State Water Board must ensure consistency with the designated beneficial uses of waters affected by the project, the water quality objectives developed to protect those uses, and anti-degradation requirements. (*PUD No. 1 of Jefferson County v. Washington Dept. of Ecology* (1994) 511 U.S. 700, 714-719.)

2. The draft IS/MND should further clarify that the "auxiliary spillway," referenced on pages 13, 28, 46, and 101, is not currently part of the Proposed Project but has been previously subject to California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review (Camp Far West Auxiliary Spillway Expansion Project [SSWD 2018]; May 2020 Addendum), has recently been the subject of a separate application to amend the existing FERC license, and is intended to be a Hydroelectric Project facility under FERC's pending relicensing application.
3. The draft IS/MND states on page 18, "SSWD will file an application for a water quality certificate with the SWRCB within 60 days after the date that FERC issues a notice that SSWD's Application for New License is ready for environmental analysis (18 Code of Federal Regulations [C.F.R.] § 4.34(b)(5))." As noted in the following paragraph of page 18 and in Table 1.6-1 on page 19, SSWD already filed the request for water quality certification with the State Water Board on May 17, 2021.
4. According to the draft IS/MND, "No septic tanks or alternative wastewater disposal systems are included as part of the Proposed Project." (IS/MND, p. 143.) State Water Board staff request clarification regarding the statement because draft IS/MND Appendix B, Recreation Facilities Plan, identifies the Proposed Project's recreation facilities as including: a Recreational Vehicle (RV) Dump Station, a sewage pond, a water treatment plant, as well as portable chemical toilets. Specifically, the recreational water system "includes a sewage pond with an aerator to handle the sanitary needs of the flush restroom buildings and the RV dump station." (IS/MND Appendix B, p. 2-14.) Also, draft IS/MND Appendix B, Recreation Facilities Plan, Table 2.0-1 identifies a total of 16 portable chemical toilets located at the North Shore and South Shore Recreation Areas. (IS/MND Appendix B, p. 2-2.) Please describe how the facilities described above do or do not meet the definition of septic tanks or alternative wastewater disposal systems. Additionally, please describe if any of the wastewater disposal systems or related infrastructure may be inundated due to the pool raise.
5. According to the draft IS/MND, the Spenceville Fault is located "just to the east of the Proposed Project area." (IS/MND, pp. 139 & 141.) State Water Board staff request that the final IS/MND, Section 2.7 *Geology and Soils*, note the shortest distance between the Spenceville Fault and the Proposed Project Boundary.

6. In addition to the draft IS/MND's considerations related to utilities in the regions of the Proposed Project (IS/MND, pp. 211-213), the final IS/MND should further introduce and consider the existing conditions specifically of SSWD's recreational water system, wastewater (sewer) system, electrical connections, and solid waste service, as well as any proposed rehabilitation, replacement, relocation, or other changes to portions thereof.

Section 1 - Introduction

1. *Section 1.4 Scope of Analysis* discusses that in addition to continued operations of the Camp Far West Hydroelectric Project, there are five additional components being analyzed in the draft IS/MND, which in summary include: 1) modification of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) boundary; 2) implementation of a new flow regime; 3) implementation of environmental measures; 4) increase the height of Camp Far West Spillway by 5 feet to raise the maximum reservoir elevation (pool raise); and 5) recreation feature relocations and improvements. The draft IS/MND states that the recreation feature relocations and improvements components will be analyzed at a programmatic level at this time. (IS/MND, p. 3.)

With a programmatic analysis of recreation feature relocations and improvements, SSWD and responsible agencies must be able to conclude that the Proposed Project, including the proposed Recreation Facilities Plan and subsequent proposed project-specific actions, will not result in significant impacts to the environment, and the current draft IS/MND analysis and Recreation Facilities Plan do not provide sufficient information to inform this determination.

State Water Board staff request the undetermined aspects of the recreation feature relocations and improvements be further explained and detailed in both the final IS/MND and the Recreation Facilities Plan (proposed Measure RR1). Specifically, in relation to recreation feature relocations and improvements, State Water Board are requesting additional information regarding:

- Footprints for both existing and proposed features;
- Location of relocated recreation features;
- Plan for demolition of any features that cannot be relocated;
- Timing and duration of construction activities;
- Specific BMPs or sources of relevant BMPs to protect environmental resources such as biological resources, and water quality; and
- Existing and proposed drainage pattern, runoff, and flood zones.

2. *Section 1.5 Description of the Proposed Project* in part states, “The fall and spring pulse flows shall be measured as described in the *Minimum Streamflows* section above and are not additive to the minimum streamflows.” (IS/MND, p. 8.) No measurement methodology is provided in the *Minimum Streamflows* section or elsewhere in the draft IS/MND. Please either clarify the measurement methodology or provide sufficient references to where this information is located, such as applicable sections of the amended Final License Application (FLA).
3. *Section 1.5 Description of the Proposed Project* includes a discussion on ramping rates and in part states, “SSWD shall, when the average hourly release from Camp Far West Dam is less than 725 cfs from November through May, make a good faith effort to adhere to the ramping rates proposed in the FLA.” (IS/MND, p. 8)

State Water Board staff request that the final IS/MND include the most recent proposed ramping rate values (proposed Measure AR3) as described and listed in SSWD’s amended FLA dated October 25, 2019. Additionally, instead of listing a range of maximum reduction in releases, as currently shown in Table 1.5-2 of the draft IS/MND, please add tables similar to those in Proposed Measure AR3 of the amended FLA. State Water Board staff note that SSWD’s most recently proposed range of target maximum ramping rates for February 1 through May 31 is 10 cfs to 100 cfs.

Additionally, if analysis in the draft IS/MND was based on the outdated proposed ramping rate values described in *Section 1.5 Description of the Proposed Project*, SSWD must analyze its more recently proposed ramping rate values and should explain any differences in anticipated operation and outcomes.

4. *Section 1.6 Environmental Review Process* in part states, “Activities beyond routine Proposed Project operation and maintenance and commitments defined in SSWD’s FLA, as amended, are not addressed in this IS/MND, and would be assessed for CEQA compliance and permitting requirements separately as any non-routine operation and maintenance activities arise.” (IS/MND, p. 18.) In the final IS/MND, please reference specific sections of the amended FLA defining “routine” maintenance and operations (e.g., amended FLA Exh. B, secs. 6.4 and 7; Exh. E2, Recreation Facilities Plan, sec. 3.0).

Section 2.3 – Air Quality

1. *Impact Analysis b) Result in a cumulatively considerable net increase of any criteria pollutant for which the project region is non-attainment under an applicable federal or state ambient air quality standard* in part states, “The area of disturbance associated with the recreational feature rehabilitation, replacement, and relocation is estimated to be approximately 15 acres. This is much smaller than the area to be disturbed by the Camp Far West Reservoir pool raise (less than 30 acres). Therefore, the recreational feature relocations and improvements are anticipated to have a smaller air quality impact than the

pool raise. As a result, impacts would be less than significant, and no mitigation would be required.” (IS/MND, p. 42.) The draft IS/MND employs the same rationale for assessing the Proposed Project’s potential greenhouse gas emissions associated with feature rehabilitation, replacement, and relocation. (IS/MND, pp. 42 & 148.) For recreational feature rehabilitation, replacement, relocation, and related activities and improvements, SSWD generally indicates that it will later develop and identify intended specific sub-projects and then consider whether additional or supplemental project-level CEQA analysis is required. (IS/MND, pp. 3, 16, 88, 220.)

A smaller disturbance area alone is not fully indicative of less air quality impacts. The nature and schedule of construction activities associated with recreation feature rehabilitation, replacement, and relocation may be more determinative to air pollutant and greenhouse gas emissions than the pool raise as multiple construction sites may be needed, and construction vehicle use and transportation creates air pollution and associated greenhouse gas emissions. The IS/MND’s reliance on the size of the disturbance area is inadequate to analyze the potential impacts.

A programmatic analysis of the Proposed Project’s recreation feature relocation and improvements must reasonably consider the potential environmental impacts of the intended sub-projects, in this context including potential exceedances of the applicable Feather River Air Quality Management District (FRAQMD) and Placer County Air Pollution Control District (PCAPCD) air quality thresholds of significance. State Water Board staff request further environmental analysis and explanation of the recreation feature relocation and improvements in the final IS/MND and, if necessary due to this further analysis or remaining uncertainty, a proposed mitigation measure to ensure Proposed Project air quality and greenhouse gas impacts will remain less than significant.

Section 2.4 – Biological Resources

1. In June 2019, the California Fish and Game Commission declared four species of bumble bee - Crotch bumble bee, Franklin’s bumble bee, Western bumble bee, and Suckley cuckoo bumble bee - as candidate species under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA). State Water Board staff request that candidate bee species with the potential to occur within the biological study area (BSA) be included in the final IS/MND Table 2.4-2 and analyzed for potential impacts.
2. State Water Board staff request that the final IS/MND include a list of any documented occurrences of harmful algal blooms/cyanobacteria within Camp Far West Reservoir.
3. Section 2.4 *Biological Resources* has two separate “Regulatory Setting” subsections that summarize Clean Water Act section 401 (IS/MND pp. 80 & 82). These descriptions should be reconciled to recognize that the State Water Board

and the nine Regional Water Quality Control Boards all have and exercise authority under Clean Water Act section 401 in certain circumstances. Furthermore, the description of section 401 on page 82 of the draft IS/MND focuses on state water quality certification for federal permits for the discharge of dredged or fill material under Clean Water Act section 404. Given the context of the Proposed Project, the draft IS/MND should discuss that federal permits or licenses subject to section 401 also include FERC licenses. Please also see General Comments, comment 1, above.

Please note that any action taken on an application for water quality certification for this Proposed Project as it relates to the Hydroelectric Project would be by the State Water Board, not the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board. For additional information on certification actions that must be requested from the State Water Board, with notification to the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board, please refer to California Code of Regulations, title 23, section 3855(b)(1)(B).

4. Regarding the draft IS/MND's summary of "waters of that state" (draft IS/MND, p. 83), please also see the State Water Board's State Wetland Definition and Procedures for Discharges of Dredged or Fill Material to Waters of the State (available at https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/cwa401/wrapp.html).
5. *Sensitive Natural Communities* of the draft IS/MND in part states, "A [U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)]-verified preliminary jurisdictional determination was issued on September 13, 2018, for SSWD's expansion project." (IS/MND, p. 55.) State Water Board staff request that the final IS/MND include the scope of the preliminary determination and clarify if it included all areas that will be inundated following the pool raise. Please also include a reference to or a summary of the results of the 2013 formal USACE wetland delineation performed for the entirety of the Camp Far West Reservoir.
6. Mitigation Measure MM-BIO-07 in part states "construction BMPs would be employed on site to prevent degradation to on-site and off-site aquatic resources." (IS/MND, p. 91.) State Water Board staff request that mitigation measure MM-BIO-07 of the final IS/MND reference a specific list of BMPs or a source containing relevant BMPs.

Section 2.10 – Hydrology and Water Quality

1. According to the draft IS/MND, "For the protection of fish and wildlife, SSWD's Permit 18360 identifies a minimum required release of 25 cfs during April 1 through June 30 and 10 cfs from July 1 through March 31. No changes to water rights are part of the Proposed Project." (IS/MND, p. 158; see also similar statements at pp. 7, 13, & 18.) State Water Board staff note, however, that a subset of the minimum streamflows proposed by SSWD in draft IS/MND Table 1.5-1 and proposed Measure AR1 are less than the 25 cfs bypass flow

required by SSWD's water rights from April 1 through June 30 (Permit 18360 [Application A026162], License 11118 [Application A014804], and License 11120 [Application A010221]).

SSWD will remain obligated to comply with the requirements of both its FERC license and its various water rights, and SSWD may, in the case of conflicting terms under certain circumstances, be required to bypass or maintain the higher required streamflow. SSWD may separately file petitions with the State Water Board's Division of Water Rights to change the terms and conditions of SSWD's water rights consistent with its proposed FERC license measures and conditions.

2. Regarding "Regulatory Setting" (IS/MND, pp. 158-159), as it pertains to the Clean Water Act and the Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act, please see General Comments, comment 1, and Section 2.4 – Biological Resources, comment 3, above.
3. State Water Board staff request that the final IS/MND state if the pool raise will require any dredge or fill work within the ordinary high-water mark of Camp Far West Reservoir or other surface waters such as the Bear River. If so, please include an estimate of the dredge and fill volumes, locations of fill material storage, locations of dredge activities, and any associated water quality protection measures.
4. Impact Analysis a) *Violate any water quality standards or waste discharge requirements or otherwise substantially degrade surface or ground water quality* is insufficient to fully analyze the potential impacts of the pool raise. The impact analysis currently discusses operations of the reservoir with a pool raise in place as beneficial. The draft IS/MND analysis does not evaluate the potential water quality impacts associated with construction and initial filling of Camp Far West Reservoir following a pool raise. Additionally, the analysis does not include an evaluation of subsequent wave action potentially increasing erosion and sedimentation to surface waters. State Water Board staff request that the IS/MND evaluate the potential impacts to water quality standards associated with construction, initial filling/operation, and subsequent wave action associated with a pool raise.

Impact Analysis a) should discuss each water quality standard listed in the SR/SJR Basin Plan and Bay Delta Plan that could be impacted by the Proposed Project and include analysis as to the extent of potential impacts, or justification for why no impact would occur.

Finally, State Water Board staff request that section Impact Analysis a) distinguish between the Bear River upstream of Camp Far West Reservoir, Camp Far West Reservoir, and the Bear River downstream of Camp Far West Reservoir when discussing the State Water Board's CWA section 303(d) listings. Specifically, State Water Board staff note that the following waterbodies are documented as impaired: Bear River from Combie Reservoir to Camp Far West

Reservoir is listed for mercury; Camp Far West Reservoir is listed for mercury; and Bear River downstream of Camp Far West Reservoir is listed for mercury, copper, and chlorpyrifos. State Water Board staff also note that in the draft 2020-2022 report released by the State Water Board, the Bear River downstream of Camp Far West Reservoir is listed for mercury, aluminum, iron, and chlorpyrifos.

Please note, in FERC relicensing for the Hydroelectric Project, SSWD acknowledges that there are two copper mines near Camp Far West Reservoir as well as historic mining and industrial activities. The IS/MND should include a discussion of the copper mines and industrial activities to the extent that such historic activities and remaining features or contaminants (e.g., cyanide plant and copper mines), when coupled with the Proposed Project, could result in water quality impacts.

5. Impact Analysis *c-i) Substantially alter the existing drainage pattern of the site or area, including through the alteration of the course of a stream or river or through the addition of impervious surfaces, in a manner which would: result in substantial erosion or siltation on- or off-site* is insufficient to fully analyze the potential impacts of the pool raise. The pool raise analysis focuses on the Proposed Project not creating additional impervious surfaces but lacks analysis of the potential inundation of portions of the Bear River, which could result in substantial erosion or siltation on- or off- site. State Water Board staff request that the IS/MND evaluate the potential impacts of the Proposed Project's pool raise on the alteration of the course of a stream or river (i.e., potential inundation of portions of the Bear River) that would result in substantial erosion or siltation on- or off-site.
6. Impact Analysis *e) conflict with or obstruct implementation of a water quality control plan or sustainable groundwater management plan* is insufficient at analyzing the potential impacts of the Proposed Project to implementation of the SR/SJR Basin Plan and the Bay-Delta Plan.

In full, the draft IS/MND's analysis of consistency with a water quality control plan states, "Activities associated with the Proposed Project are expected to enhance water quality objectives and beneficial uses in the Proposed Project area and would not conflict with the Central Valley Basin Plan (Central Valley RWQCB 2018)." (IS/MND, p. 165.)

State Water Board staff request impact analysis e) include a full evaluation of the Proposed Project's potential impacts related to implementation of both water quality control plans referenced above, including an evaluation of potential impacts to water quality standards, objectives, and designated beneficial uses. Please note, once impact analysis a) is updated to provide an adequate evaluation of water quality impacts (see comments 4, 7, and 8), other impact analysis sections may also refer to it as applicable.

7. Impact Analysis a) *Violate any water quality standards or waste discharge requirements or otherwise substantially degrade surface or ground water quality* includes the statement, “SSWD would not plan to perform any operation or maintenance activities associated with the release or mobilization of mercury.” (IS/MND, p. 160.) State Water Board staff note that existing and proposed reservoir operations (e.g., stratification and creation of anoxic conditions) and Proposed Project releases for hydropower may affect mercury mobilization and transportation through the Bear River. Additionally, the pool raise will create additional areas of inundation which may provide more areas for mercury methylation and surface water interactions. These Proposed Project activities should be considered in the CEQA analysis for potential impacts to water quality.
8. Impact Analysis a) *Violate any water quality standards or waste discharge requirements or otherwise substantially degrade surface or ground water quality* includes, “Considering that the pool raise would increase water-surface elevations and overall storage, some water quality parameters may decrease as constituents (e.g., metals and nutrients) are further diluted by the increase in water.” (IS/MND, p. 160.) State Water Board staff request SSWD provide additional information to support this statement. Increasing the size of Camp Far West Reservoir could provide increased residence time for constituents which may lead to increased concentrations.

Minor Wording and Format Clarifications

1. Section 2.4 *Biological Resources* in part states, “The Central Valley is responsible for enforcing water quality criteria and protecting water resources near the Proposed Project.” (IS/MND, p. 82, underlining added.) Please change related references in the final IS/MND to the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board, or “Central Valley RWQCB.” Please also see General Comments, comment 1, and Section 2.4 – Biological Resources, comment 3, above.
2. The following Proposed Project component sub-headings for the draft IS/MND, section 2.10.c-iv), are missing: *Camp Far West Reservoir Pool Raise and Recreation Feature Rehabilitation, Replacement, and Relocation*. Please add the sub-headings to the final IS/MND.
3. Draft IS/MND, Appendix B, contains an outdated version of the Recreation Facilities Plan. In the final IS/MND, please include the amended version released by SSWD in a letter to FERC on October 25, 2019. The amended recreation facilities plan can be found at the following location: https://elibrary.ferc.gov/eLibrary/filelist?accession_number=20191025-5254&optimized=false.
4. The reference to “California SWQCB” (IS/MND, p. 158) should be revised to “SWRCB.” Please also see Section 2.10 – Hydrology and Water Quality, comment 2, above.

5. The reference to “Bear Creek” on page 208 of the Draft IS/MND should be revised to “Bear River.”
6. At page 3 of the IS/MND, the reference to section 21159.27 should be to CEQA, or the Public Resources Code, not the “CEQA guidelines.”
7. Page 152 of the IS/MND suggests that the Cortese List can be found on EnviroStor, but this only applies to the portions overseen by the Department of Toxic Substances Control. See also <https://calepa.ca.gov/sitecleanup/corteselist/>.