

Notice of Availability

To: Agencies, Organizations, and Interested Parties

SUBJECT: Notice of Availability of a Draft Environmental Impact Report for the Simulation of Natural Flows in Middle Piru Creek Project; Draft Application for License Amendment for Federal Energy Regulatory Commission Project No. 2426

The California Department of Water Resources (CDWR), acting as the lead agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), has prepared a Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the proposed Simulation of Natural Flows in Middle Piru Creek Project. The project description, location, and potential environmental effects of the proposed project are summarized below.

AGENCIES: We request the views of your agency as to the environmental analysis relevant to your agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed project. Your agency will need to use the Draft EIR prepared by CDWR when considering any permit or other approval your agency may issue for the proposed project.

ORGANIZATIONS AND INTERESTED PARTIES: Comments regarding the environmental analysis contained in the Draft EIR are requested from organizations and individuals. A 60-day public comment period on the Draft EIR will extend from November 9, 2004 to January 7, 2005. Comments must be received at the address below by 5:00 p.m., January 7, 2004. Please submit your comments to:

Dr. Eva Begley
Department of Water Resources
1416 Ninth Street, Room 620
Sacramento, CA 95814
Fax: (916) 653-8250

A public meeting will be held on December 16, 2004, from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. at the City of Santa Clarita City Hall, City Council Chambers, 23920 Valencia Boulevard. All parties are welcome to attend and comment on the Draft EIR. If you require additional information, please contact Dr. Begley at (916) 653-5951.

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, if you need special assistance to participate in the meeting, please contact Ms. Carolina Morgan at (818) 597-3407 x338. Notification 48 hours prior to the meeting will enable the meeting coordinators to make reasonable arrangements to ensure accessibility to this meeting.

PROJECT TITLE: Simulation of Natural Flows in Middle Piru Creek

PROJECT LOCATION: The proposed project would occur along middle Piru Creek. Piru Creek is located in northwestern Los Angeles County and eastern Ventura County, California. The portion of the creek that has been designated, for the purposes of the proposed project, as middle Piru Creek flows from Pyramid Dam to Lake Piru and is approximately 18 miles in length. Except for a few private inholdings, middle Piru Creek is surrounded by Angeles National Forest and Los Padres National Forest.

Pyramid Dam, which is situated at the southern end of Pyramid Lake, is located in the northwest corner of Los Angeles County, California. Pyramid Lake is split by the jurisdictional boundary between Angeles National Forest and Los Padres National Forest, but lies within the administrative boundary of Angeles National Forest. Los Angeles National Forest manages all recreational facilities at the lake except for the Vista del Lago Visitor Center, which is managed by CDWR. Pyramid Lake lies approximately 13 miles north of Castaic. Pyramid Lake and Pyramid Dam are part of the State Water

Project; they fall within the jurisdictional boundaries of Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) Project No. 2426. CDWR and the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power are the co-licensees for FERC Project No. 2426.

Lake Piru is located along the eastern border of Ventura County, California, approximately five miles northeast of the community of Piru. Lake Piru is a water storage reservoir maintained and operated by the United Water Conservation District (United); its northern end lies in Los Padres National Forest. Lake Piru is not part of FERC Project No. 2426.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

CDWR proposes implementation of modified water operations guidelines for Pyramid Dam to simulate the natural hydrology of middle Piru Creek to the extent operationally feasible and consistent with safety considerations. The primary objective of simulating the natural hydrological regime of middle Piru Creek is to avoid the incidental take (direct and indirect injury and mortality) of a federally endangered species, the arroyo toad (*Bufo californicus*) by State Water Project operations. A second objective of the proposed project is to allow State Water Project water deliveries to United Water Conservation District via middle Piru Creek to Lake Piru.

Under the proposed project, stream releases from Pyramid Dam into middle Piru Creek would be similar to the natural inflows of water into Pyramid Lake as determined by CDWR's model for natural inflow into Pyramid Lake. Implementation of the proposed project would be as follows:

- Natural inflow to Pyramid Lake would be released into middle Piru Creek at a rate of up to approximately 18,000 cubic feet per second (cfs), which is the maximum safe designed release from Pyramid Dam. The exact maximum safe release depends on the lake surface water elevation at the time of the release.
- Storm releases into middle Piru Creek may be less than 18,000 cfs if they are deemed a threat to life, safety, or property at Pyramid Dam or downstream of the dam.
- DWR may elect to appropriate inflow to Pyramid Lake above the safe release flows under the provisions of its existing water rights.
- Up to 3,150 acre feet of State Water Project water may be delivered to United via middle Piru Creek between November 1st and the end of February of each water year. During this period, water deliveries may be made over a period of a few days, ramping up and down flows to simulate the hydrograph of a typical storm event, or they may be released more gradually over a longer period of time.
- Releases into middle Piru Creek may be increased by up to 50 cfs for short periods of time to exercise the Pyramid Dam radial gate and stream release valves, to test emergency power sources for operating State Water Project facilities, to conduct tests mandated by FERC or other agencies, or to meet other short-term operational or maintenance requirements. Except for unscheduled events (such as equipment failures) or emergencies, no such tests would be scheduled between March 15th and June 15th. Testing would also be avoided to the extent possible between June 16th and July 31st. Tests may be conducted at any time between August 1st and March 14th, provided that flows do not increase by more than 50 cfs above current base flows during the event and that the event does not last longer than 15 minutes. Scheduled tests requiring larger releases or lasting longer than 15 minutes would require prior notification of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), with further consultation as determined necessary by USFWS; unscheduled releases would require notification of USFWS no later than three business days after the event, again with further consultation as determined necessary by USFWS.
- The gauging station on upper Piru Creek provides 24-hour averages; therefore instantaneous peak stream releases may be attenuated. Unlike a natural inflow hydrograph, which typically peaks sharply, the stream release hydrograph of middle Piru Creek may be attenuated.

- A multiplier is used to account for those portions of the Pyramid Lake watershed that are not tributaries of upper Piru Creek and Cañada de los Alamos upstream of their respective gauging stations. This may result in some deviations for individual storm events due to localized variations in storm water intensity.
- Due to operational constraints, the stream release hydrograph of middle Piru Creek would typically lag measured inflow by approximately one day. Occasionally, the delay may be longer.
- The valves at Pyramid Dam can be adjusted for release flows of less than three cfs; however, the precise measurement of release flows of less than three cfs may not be possible due to operational constraints of the dam's gauging instrumentation.

Implementation of the proposed project would result in greater volumes of water flowing through middle Piru Creek when storms occur during the rainy season (which typically extends from November through April). Between May and October (generally considered the dry season), the volume and rate of flows into middle Piru Creek would diminish incrementally in response to progressively smaller volumes of natural surface water flows entering Pyramid Lake.

POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

The Draft EIR concludes that impacts associated biological resources, water resources, cultural and paleontological resources, and recreation would occur as a result of the proposed project. Each of these issue areas is addressed and analyzed in the Draft EIR. All potential environmental effects can be mitigated to a less-than-significant level.

Pursuant to the requirements of CEQA, other environmental effects that are evaluated in the Draft EIR include:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| • Aesthetics | • Mineral Resources |
| • Agricultural Resources | • Noise |
| • Air Quality | • Population and Housing |
| • Geology and Soils | • Public Services |
| • Hazards and Hazardous Materials | • Transportation and Traffic |
| • Land Use and Planning | • Utilities and Service Systems |

The Draft EIR also includes analysis of a reasonable range of alternatives, including a No Project alternative.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CEQA AND FEDERAL ENERGY REGULATORY COMMISSION REQUIREMENTS

The license for FERC Project No. 2426 includes requirements for maintenance of a year-round trout fishery in Piru Creek between Pyramid Dam and Frenchman's Flat and minimum releases of water from Pyramid Dam into middle Piru Creek, as described in the Draft EIR. Although middle Piru Creek lies outside FERC's jurisdictional boundary, these fishery and stream release requirements were included in the license as offsite mitigation for the environmental impacts of construction of Pyramid Lake and other nearby State Water Project facilities. Implementation of the proposed project would conflict with these requirements and therefore require amendment of the FERC license. If the Final EIR for the proposed project is certified and DWR approves the proposed project, DWR's next step would be to submit a request for license amendment to FERC. The certified Final EIR would constitute the core of the request since it contains both a description of the proposed project and environmental documentation.

The request for license amendment would also include a request to change the deadline for submitting biennial fishery status reports to FERC from June 30, as stipulated in FERC Order 2426-144 Paragraph (C), to December 31 of every other year. This change would ensure that the period covered by each report consists of two complete trout stocking seasons rather than portions of seasons.

The Federal Code of Regulations (18 CFR 4.38) requires that before submitting a license amendment to FERC, a licensee consult with resource agencies and Indian tribes and that these agencies and tribes be given

a minimum of 60 days to comment on the draft application for license amendment. With regard to simulation of natural flows in middle Piru Creek, consultation was initiated by distribution of the Notice of Preparation. The Draft EIR, together with the supplemental information in this Notice of Availability regarding the FERC process and reporting deadlines, constitutes the draft application for amendment of the license for FERC Project No. 2426. The customary 45-day CEQA review period has been extended to 60 days to accommodate the federal process.

Upon receipt of DWR's request for amending the license for Project No. 2426, FERC would initiate its own environmental review process in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Agencies, organizations, and interested individuals would have further opportunities for input during the NEPA process, for which FERC would serve as the lead agency. Upon completion of the NEPA process, FERC would issue an order approving, denying, or modifying the proposed changes to the license.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Daniel F. Peterson". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a solid horizontal line.

Signature
Daniel F. Peterson

November 8, 2004