

Regional Water Quality Control Board
North Coast Region
Executive Officer's Summary Report
August 20, 2020

ITEM: 3

SUBJECT: Update on the Potter Valley Project (Pam Jeane, Sonoma Water)

BOARD ACTION: This item is an informational item only; no action will be taken by the Regional Water Board.

BACKGROUND: The Potter Valley Project (Project) is a hydro-electric project owned by Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) and licensed by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). The Project has been operated since 1908 and has a great influence over water supplies and streamflows in the Eel and Russian Rivers. The project includes a reservoir, diversion tunnel and penstock, and a powerhouse. Scott Dam forms Lake Pillsbury, which is used to store winter runoff where it is released to provide water for hydro-electric generation throughout the year. An inter-basin diversion from the Eel River to the headwaters of the East Fork of the Russian River in Potter Valley provides the stored water to the Potter Valley Powerhouse, where the electricity is generated. The powerhouse discharge enters the East Fork Russian River and most of this water is eventually captured in Lake Mendocino near Ukiah, though some is diverted by the Potter Valley Irrigation District for agricultural use. The amount of water stored in Lake Mendocino is greatly influenced by water storage in Lake Pillsbury and Project operations.

The Project's FERC license expires in 2022. PG&E began the relicensing process in 2016. In January 2019, PG&E withdrew its notice of intent to relicense the Project, leaving the future of the Project uncertain. Since that time, the Two-Basin Partnership, a consortium consisting of California Trout, the Round Valley Indian Tribes, the County of Humboldt, Mendocino County Inland Water and Power Commission, and Sonoma Water have stepped forward to take over the FERC license. The Two-Basin Partnership has a stated intent to define a new project that serves the water supply and fisheries needs in both the Eel and Russian Rivers. More information on the Two-Basin Partnership can be found at twobasinsolution.org.

The Two-Basin Partnership is an outgrowth of discussions held during Congressman Jared Huffman's collaborative Ad Hoc process, which was created by the Congressman to develop recommendations to inform FERC relicensing of the Potter Valley Project, consistent with a two-basin solution. The principles of the two-basin solution put forward by Congressman Huffman were the co-equal goals of (1) improving fish passage and habitat on the Eel River to support native anadromous fish populations, and (2) minimizing or avoiding adverse impacts to water supply reliability, fisheries, water quality, and recreation in the Russian River and Eel River basins. More information on the Ad Hoc process can be found at pottervalleyproject.org.

DISCUSSION: Pam Jeane of Sonoma Water will present to the Board more details associated with the Two Basin Partnership, the most recent filing with FERC, and the timeline for future development of the Two-Basin solution.

RECOMMENDATIONS: N/A

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS: See links above.

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