

DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES

P.O. BOX 388
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August 30, 1985

Honorable Ruben S. Ayala, Chairperson
Senate Committee on Agriculture
and Water Resources
State Capitol, Room 2090
Sacramento, CA 95814

Honorable Robert B. Presley, Chairperson
Senate Natural Resources and
Wildlife Committee
State Capitol, Room 2031
Sacramento, CA 95814

Honorable Jim Costa, Chairperson
Assembly Committee on Water,
Parks and Wildlife
State Capitol, Room 2003
Sacramento, CA 95814

Honorable Byron D. Sher, Chairperson
Assembly Natural Resources Committee
State Capitol, Room 2136
Sacramento, CA 95814

Gentlemen:

Eel River Development

This has been prepared pursuant to the California Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, which became effective in March 1973. Section 5093.54(d) of that Act, as set forth in the Public Resources Code, provides that:

"...It is the intent of the Legislature, with respect to the Eel River and its tributaries, that after an initial period of 12 years following the effective date of this chapter, the Department of Water Resources shall report to the Legislature as to the need for water supply and flood control projects on the Eel River and its tributaries, and the Legislature shall hold public hearings to determine whether legislation should be enacted to delete all or any segment of the river from the system."

Based upon the situation today, we see no reason to seek legislation to withdraw the Eel River from the Wild and Scenic Rivers System. This is a decision to be considered by future generations.

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History of Department of Water Resources Involvement in the Eel River

Possible Eel River water development has been studied at various levels of intensity, spanning a 25-year period from the 1950s to the 1970s.

1. Possible development of the Eel River, along with other major California streams, was studied in the early 1950s on a broad reconnaissance basis and reported on in Bulletin 3, "The California Water Plan", the final report of the Statewide Water Resources Investigation, published in 1957.
2. Following Bulletin 3, the north coastal rivers were studied more intensively over a seven-year period and reported on in Bulletin 136, "North Coastal Area Investigation", in 1964. That study concluded that a multipurpose reservoir on the Middle Fork Eel River was the most favorable initial north coastal project for development of additional supplies for the State Water Project (SWP), with routing to the Delta either easterly by gravity to the Sacramento Valley or southerly by a pumped diversion through Clear Lake. The Bulletin recommended a feasibility-level planning program to define specific storage facilities and to select a route for diversion to the Delta.
3. During the Bulletin 136 study period, the 1959 Legislature enacted the California Water Resources Development Bond Act, more commonly called the Burns-Porter Act. The Act, which was approved by the electorate in November 1960, authorized the sale of general obligation bonds and provided funds to assist in the construction of a State Water Resources Development System, commonly called the State Water Project. The Act reserved a portion of the general obligation bonds to finance the construction of additional facilities to meet local needs, including flood control, and to augment the supplies of water in the Delta from multipurpose projects in the Sacramento, Eel, and other North Coast Rivers. The bonds set aside for these special purposes have become known as "offset bonds" and currently total \$167 million.
4. Based on the recommendations in Bulletin 136, and under authority of the Burns-Porter Act, the Director of Water Resources issued Project Order No. 7 on March 9, 1964, authorizing the Upper Eel River Development facilities to be added to the SWP. The development, as authorized, would have involved several reservoirs, most notably Dos Rios Dam and Reservoir on the Middle Fork Eel River, and associated

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conveyance facilities. Diversion to the Sacramento River Basin would be either by gravity easterly to Grindstone Creek, with inclusion of elements of a planned Glenn Reservoir Complex on the western side of the Sacramento Valley, or southerly by pumping to a possible storage reservoir on the upper main stem of the Eel, with diversion through a tunnel to Clear Lake to the Sacramento Valley via Soda Creek, Putah Creek, and Lake Berryessa.

5. The Director of Water Resources, in the 1964 Project Order, signaled the go-ahead for an intensive investigation by the Department for alternative conveyance routes from the Eel River to the Sacramento Valley. Subsequently, the December 1964 flood broke all records on the Eel River and stimulated interest in providing flood protection. By a Memorandum of Understanding between the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) and the State of California, dated October 5, 1967, the Corps agreed to investigate the Dos Rios Dam. (Concurrently, under agreement among members of the California State-Federal Interagency Group -- consisting at that time of the Department, the Corps, the U. S. Bureau Reclamation (Bureau), and the U. S. Soil Conservation Service -- the Bureau initiated an investigation of English Ridge Dam in the Upper Eel.)
6. The Eel River Association was organized and met frequently during the 1960s to provide grass roots support for development of the Eel River.
7. Following three years of intensive study, the Department published Bulletin 171, "Upper Eel River Development, Investigation of Alternative Conveyance Routes", in 1967. That Bulletin recommended an easterly gravity conveyance route through a tunnel to Grindstone Creek and the proposed Glenn Reservoir Complex in the Sacramento Valley. Controversy concerning that decision began immediately, particularly among Lake County interests who strongly desired a southerly routing through Clear Lake. Lake County commissioned Kaiser Engineers to make an independent review, appraising the possible impacts of Eel River imports on Clear Lake water quality.
8. Because of the controversy surrounding the easterly routing recommendation, the California Water Commission (CWC), at a public hearing on August 2, 1968, recommended that the Department develop additional information on the question of routing. Following this request, and in consideration of the sentiment for a southerly routing, the Department was requested formally by Senate Concurrent Resolution 76 (1968 Session) to make additional studies and review previous studies bearing on recommendations as to the extent to which further

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routing studies should be made. This resulted in an investigation of future demands for water along alternate routes. The results of the study were published in 1971 as Bulletin 184, "Ten Counties Investigation".

9. The Corps' Interim Report on Dos Rios Dam and Reservoir in 1968 was a major event in this sequence of activities. It suggested construction of a high dam on the Middle Fork Eel River that would inundate Round Valley in Mendocino County. Controversy began to develop immediately over the proposed flooding of Round Valley, the Town of Covelo, and the Round Valley Indian Reservation. Because of the controversy, Governor Reagan, by letter in May 1969, requested that the Department investigate alternatives that would not inundate Round Valley.
10. A study of alternatives to the high Dos Rios Dam was reported on in December 1969 in Bulletin 172, "Eel River Development Alternatives", after which the reexamination of Eel River routing was resumed. A small reservoir that would not inundate Round Valley was studied as an alternative to the large Dos Rios. The report noted that the storage capacity of the small reservoir would accommodate the anticipated sediment and landslide debris only for a limited period of time, and, of course, the yield would be smaller than from the large Dos Rios.
11. A comprehensive evaluation of alternative Eel River projects and routings, including storage facilities in the Sacramento Valley, was incorporated in a 1972 office report of the Northern District of the Department.
12. Concurrent with the Eel River studies, the environmental community was becoming outspoken in its opposition to development of the Eel River as a source of additional water for the SWP. It was becoming a matter not so much as to how the Eel should be developed, but if it should be developed at all. In recognition of this situation, and because of the slowing in demand for additional water, the CWC and the State water contractors requested in 1970 that the Department reduce the level of expenditures for Eel River planning.
13. Environmental concerns regarding development of the north coastal streams began coming to a head in the early 1970s, influenced largely by fishery problems with the existing Trinity River Division of the federal Central Valley Project. There was a considerable body of opinion holding that until the Trinity River fishery problem was solved, there should be no further development in the North Coast. This concern was one of the main reasons the California Wild and Scenic

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Rivers Act was passed by the Legislature in 1972. This Act created the California Wild and Scenic Rivers System and included the Eel River, with provisions for later consideration regarding the suitability of the Eel River for continued inclusion in the system.

14. On January 19, 1981, Interior Secretary Cecil Andrus signed an order placing the Eel and other north coastal rivers in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. This decision was challenged in the courts. The matter has now been finally decided by action of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, upholding the inclusion of those rivers in the federal system. The U. S. Supreme Court declined to review this decision. Unless changed by Congress, national designation precludes any federal involvement in a project which is not consistent with the wild and scenic river status.

Summary of Current Department of Water Resources Views
on Eel River Development

During the mid-1960s, the statewide population was projected to reach 35 million by 1990 and 54 million by 2020 (Bulletin 160-66). Anticipated future needs for water were correspondingly high.

Since then, there has been a downturn in the rate of population increase and the subsequent need for additional water. Bulletin 160-83 projects a population of 28 million by 1990 and 34 million by 2010, with a statewide increase in net annual water requirements from 1980 to 2010 of 3.5 million acre-feet, as compared with a corresponding increase of 6.5 million acre-feet from 1990 to 2020 in Bulletin 160-66. The time when SWP contractors will need the full 4.2 million acre-feet per year contemplated for delivery by the SWP has been shifted from 1990 to about 2020.

Engineering studies over the last few years have disclosed alternative developments that may be more cost effective than the Eel River development. State and Federal studies have indicated that reservoir developments in the Central Valley, including offstream storage south of the Delta, may be more practical than development of the Eel River. It is also recognized that ground water storage will play a larger role in meeting dry period needs than previously assumed. Also, based upon what is known today, enlarging Shasta Dam appears more cost effective than Eel River development. More study would be needed to prove this out.

At this time, the most promising next surface storage development for the SWP appears to be offstream storage south of the Delta at the Los Banos Grandes site.

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Conclusions

In consideration of the foregoing, it is our view that we would not look to the Eel River as a practical source of additional water supply within the near future, irrespective of its wild and scenic river status. Possible projects in the Central Valley appear more favorable at this time than development of the Eel.

It is important to note that, while potential cost-effective alternatives to the Eel River have been identified, no program of alternatives has been accepted which would preclude the possibility of the eventual need for the Eel River as a feature of the SWP. Additionally, flood protection for North Coast rivers, particularly the lower Eel, represents a need which has not been satisfied.

Given California's water situation, it seems neither appropriate nor possible for one generation to fully determine or bind the actions of a future generation. It is certainly possible society may eventually wish to develop the Eel River. However, for today, maintenance of the status quo seems appropriate; that is, leave the Eel in the Wild and Scenic Rivers System, subject to future review.

If you need further information or would like to discuss this further, please call me at (916) 445-6582 or have your staff call Robert Potter of the Division of Planning at (916) 445-6860.

Sincerely,

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