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Ms. Michelle Siebal
State Water Board Resources Control Board
Division of Water Rights
WR401Program@waterboards.ca.gov
Via e-mail

Re: Comments of California Sportfishing Protection Alliance and American Whitewater on the Draft Water Quality Certification for the Relicensing of The Six Big Creek Hydroelectric Projects

Dear Ms. Siebal

American Whitewater (AW) respectfully submit comments on the Draft Water Quality Certification (Draft Certification) for the Relicensing of The Six Big Creek Hydroelectric Projects operated by Southern California Edison (SCE), (Big Creek Nos. 2a, 8, And Eastwood Hydroelectric Project [Ferc Project No. 67], Big Creek No. 3 Hydroelectric Project [Ferc Project No. 120], Mammoth Pool Hydroelectric Project [Ferc Project No. 2085], Vermilion Valley Hydroelectric Project [Ferc Project No. 2086], Portal Hydroelectric Project [Ferc Project No. 2174], And Big Creek Nos. 1 And 2 Hydroelectric Project [Ferc Project No. 2175]), referred to herein as the Big Creek Hydroelectric System (BCHS)

AW participated throughout the FERC relicensing process for the BCHS, and has been active for many years participating in every other FERC project in the San Joaquin River Basin.

In general, AW supports the Draft Certification, however, there are several components within the document that we feel could be improved and be made consistent with other Certifications. AW provides comments below on these Draft Certification conditions

CONDITION 3. Gaging FERC Project Nos. 67, 120, 2085, 2086, 2174, and 2175

Condition 3 requires the Licensee to make streamflow information available to the public via the internet.

(v) Proposal for disseminating flow monitoring and reservoir measurement data, which shall include making data available to State Water Board staff and the public via the internet, as well as other appropriate formats;

FERC licensees throughout California commonly use the California Data Exchange Center (CDEC) to provide streamflow and reservoir level information to the public. (See, for example the Mokelumne River Project (P-137), Rock Creek Cresta Project (P-1962), Pit 3, 4, 5 Project (P-233) and the Upper American River Project (P-2101)).

The Licensee currently uses their own web interface to provide information about streamflows to the public. AW recommends that the Final Certification specify that the Licensee provide information from CDEC using language that has become standard for this type of condition:

Flow information shall be available to the public via the internet on the California Data Exchange Center (CDEC) website, or at such time that CDEC is no longer viable, another publicly available source of similar information agreed upon by the Deputy Director, participating agencies, and interested stakeholders.

Most recently, the State Water Board adopted similar language for the Final 401 Certification for the South Feather Power Project (P-2088). We recommend adopting the same language here.

CONDITION 6. Ramping Rates FERC Project Nos. 67, 120, 2085, 2086, 2174, and 2175

Condition 6 describes the development of an interim and long-term ramping rate management plan. AW supports the development of this plan. Over the past decade, researchers and hydropower stakeholders have learned a great deal about how flow fluctuations, particularly during the spring snowmelt recession, can negatively impact aquatic, and recreational resources. AW has a proven track record in working collaboratively with resource agencies (including the State Board) and licensees to develop measures similar to Condition 6 on a host of hydroelectric projects across the state of California. During relicensing, AW made the decision to tie whitewater recreation opportunity directly to ecological flows for this project. This was a departure from earlier projects where we had advocated for discrete whitewater recreation opportunities. As a result the development of ramping rates for the CRMF, and other flows, will have a direct impact on whitewater recreation. Additionally, the ramping rates developed for the dams and powerhouses in the BCHS will impact downstream ramping rates at the Big Creek 4 Power Project (P-2017). AW, Water Board staff, along with other resource agencies has been working with SCE for over five years on the development of Long Term Operation Rules for that project. These rules, similar to the CRMF flows on the BCHS, will provide aquatic benefits and whitewater recreation opportunities.

For these reasons, AW requests to be included in the consultation for developing the Ramping Rates Plan. Our organizations can either be called out specifically or generally in the condition as “other interested parties.”

**CONDITION 10. Whitewater Flows
FERC Project Nos. 67, 120, 2085, and 2086**

Condition 10 specifies that the Licensee shall consult with and receive comment and recommendations from State Water Board staff, USFS, CDFW and USFWS on the development Whitewater Boating Plan. We have had extensive experience in implementing these types of plans across California. We are the key stakeholder for disseminating information about whitewater recreation opportunities. Our website includes flow information and run descriptions for the individual reaches on this project.

<https://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/detail/id/291/>
<https://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/detail/id/286/>
<https://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/detail/id/289/>
<https://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/detail/id/4011/>

We also host a flow release calendar on our website, which contains the flow dates and release levels for recreational releases that happen each year on projects across the Country.

<https://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/Release/view/>

These components will be important pieces of this plan that will enable the licensee to inform the paddling public of the river recreation opportunities on this project.

It is clear that American Whitewater should be consulted during development of this plan. In the recently releases final 401 certification for the South Feather Power Project (P-2088), the State Water Board adopted following language regarding consultation for whitewater recreation:

The Licensee shall consult with State Water Board staff, Forest Service, CDFW, USFWS, and American Whitewater (AW) regarding the following elements of recreation streamflow management for the year: target recreation streamflow magnitude; recreation streamflow schedule; anticipated method for providing recreation streamflows (i.e., supplemental flows, natural flows, or a combination of both); and any changes to whitewater boating access locations.

We recommend adopting similar language in the Final Certification.

**Condition 29 Annual Consultation Meetings
FERC Project Nos. 67, 120, 2085, 2086, 2174, and 2175**

AW appreciates and supports the annual consultation condition in the Draft Certification. In particular, AW appreciates the opportunity for our organization, other NGOs, and members of

the public to meaningfully, efficiently and effectively participate in the implementation of the new license where they might not otherwise have an opportunity to do so.

The annual consultation meeting will provide a forum for NGOs and interested stakeholders to directly hear from the Licensee and resource agencies about issues and concerns relating to the project. It will also allow the public to ask questions, participate in a dialogue, make suggestions and express concerns about the project in an informal setting. It will also benefit the Licensee by creating a “standing group” that facilitates expedient review of any license compliance issues.

We have two areas of concern with Condition 29 as written. First, 30 days notice of the meeting is not far enough in advance, many participants will need at least 60 days notice to ensure that the TRG meeting does not conflict with other scheduled meetings. Notwithstanding the requirement that the TRG will develop communication protocols, the Condition should explicitly state that all TRG members should receive draft monitoring reports and studies at least 60 days in advance of the annual meeting. If other interested parties are to be able to participate meaningfully, they must have access to the meeting materials in advance.

Second, as currently formulated, the consultation group will only meet once a year. AW recommends that Condition 29 be amended to require that the consultation group meet at least once a year, and allow for additional meetings as often as needed as determined by the TRG. As such, we also recommend that the condition be changed from an “Annual Meeting” to a “Public Consultation Meeting.”

Conclusion

AW appreciate that the Division of Water Rights has produced and circulated the Draft Certification for the South Feather Power Project. Thank you for considering our comments.

Respectfully submitted,



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