

Butte County Federal/State Land Use Coordinating Committee

September 30, 2020 3:00 PM – 3:30 PM

Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86436514152?pwd=Nmt0Slp3TUVESE4UXIKdCsyNXZCdz09>

Meeting ID: 864 3651 4152

Passcode: 301081

One tap mobile

+16699006833,,86436514152# US (San Jose)

Dial by your location: 1 669 900 6833 US (San Jose)

Meeting Minutes

- 1) Self-Introductions (committee members and public) Invited guest: Thad Walker, BCRCD; Paula Daneluk; Dennis Schmidt; Peggy Moak; public: Dorr Lewright (BCFSC) in attendance.
- 2) Approval of Minutes for 2020 meetings: August 18, 2020 M: Daneluk, 2nd: Schmidt - Approved 3-0
- 3) Update on Poe Recreation Trail – Board letter dated 9-29-20 and Motion to Intervene filed by American Whitewater and California Sportfishing Protection Alliance INFORMATION ONLY
- 4) Yellow Creek Meadow Restoration and West Shore Lake Almanor Projects – Letters of Support for the Lassen National Forest (LNF) on each project. The Yellow Creek Meadow Restoration grant was discussed at the FAC meeting of Sep. 28 and a recommendation for a CC letter of support was approved. The West Shore Lake Almanor Project was supported by the CC in September of 2019, and now the scoping period has opened at the LNF.
M: Moak: Issue letter supporting each project and have Peggy sign both letters, 2nd: Daneluk - Approved 3-0
- 5) Thad Walker provided an overview of the Butte County Resource Conservation District Butte Creek House Meadow Restoration Planning Grant Application and planning parameters. Discussion of and request for Letter of Support. (WCB Prop 1 planning grant) The grant submission deadline is October 1, 2020. Approximate grant amount is \$196,071, with a July 2021 start date, to be completed within 12-18 months.
M: Moak - Issue letter and sign 2nd: Daneluk - Approved 3-0

Project Summary:

The Butte Creek House Meadow Restoration Project builds on collaborations between diverse partners to address meadows and forest health needs in the critical Butte Creek Watershed that supports one of only three Central Valley streams that continues to harbor a self-sustaining population of spring-run Chinook salmon. In collaboration with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife we propose to develop/permit/ and complete environmental/ compliance for the 320 acres Butte Creek House Ecological Reserve, and integrate the hydrologic restoration with forest health. Future expected benefits from implementing the projects include increases in the availability and quality of water in Butte Creek; increased resiliency to climate change, wildfires, and drought; improved habitat to aid recovery of the listed species (e.g. sandhill crane and willow flycatcher, cascade frog, Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog, spotted owl, and northern goshawk), and numerous other species; and increased carbon storage. Expected benefits are the result of restoring functional ecological flows. Requested

funds will develop hydrologic restoration designs and permits to meet regulatory requirements, and complete CEQA compliance.

Past management and fire exclusion have altered forest structure, successional processes, and meadow health throughout the Butte Creek headwaters. Fire suppression has increased forest density, shifted forest composition towards more shade-tolerant species, and led to the accumulation of hazardous fuels. Meadows have been degraded through past management practices, such as hydromodification, overgrazing, willow eradication, and beaver extirpation. This has resulted in channel incision lowering the water table, impairing ecological function, and reducing the benefits of healthy meadows. To address these problems, our project will promote enhanced streamflow and resilient forests through forest health treatments while simultaneously restoring meadow systems to enhance the landscape function and ecological flows. We propose to develop a CEQA document that will: 1) restore the hydrological functioning of 110 acres of meadow 2) treat 210 acres of forest health in Butte Creek House Meadow.

The meadow restoration and thinning proposed in this project is part of a larger effort to restore the Upper Butte Creek watershed, which will enhance stream flows and involve upland forest treatments for hazardous fuels reduction through removal of merchantable and non-merchantable timber, treat natural surface roads/ trail to limit hydrologic connectivity, provide natural resource educational opportunities, and enhance recreation. This project is part of larger collaborative efforts between Butte County Resource Conservation District, Jonesville Cabin Owners Inc. Plumas National Forest- Almanor Ranger District, Friends of Butte Creek, Butte County Government, Northern California Regional Landtrust, Chico Velo Cycling Club, and other partners

Overview of Grant requirements and parameters

California voters approved the Water Quality, Supply, and Infrastructure Improvement Act of 2014 (Proposition 1) to provide funding to implement the three objectives of the California Water Action Plan, which are: more reliable water supplies, the restoration of important species and habitat, and a more resilient and sustainably managed water resources system that can better withstand inevitable and unforeseen pressures in the coming decades.

Proposition 1 authorized the Legislature to appropriate \$200 million to the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) to fund projects that result in enhanced stream flows (i.e., a change in the amount, timing, and/or quality of water flowing down a stream, or a portion of a stream, to benefit fish and wildlife). WCB distributes these funds on a competitive basis through the Stream Flow Enhancement Program (Program).

The Program funds projects that enhance stream flows and are consistent with the objectives and actions outlined in the California Water Action Plan, with the primary focus on enhancing flow in streams that support anadromous fish; support special-status, threatened, endangered, or at-risk species; or provide resilience to climate change. The goals of the Program are to:

- Support projects that lead to meaningful increases in the availability and quality of water in streams, particularly by protecting and restoring functional ecological flows for streams identified as a priority for fish and wildlife.
- Support projects that work to remove key barriers to securing enhanced flows for nature (e.g., by making it easier to change the timing of flows as needed, or streamlining processes for long-term transfers of water for stream flow).
- Support projects that allocate resources for infrastructure (e.g., gauges) for evaluating stream flow conditions and stream responses to enhancement efforts.

The process, procedures, and criteria through which WCB administers the Program are described in the Program Guidelines and Proposal Solicitation Notices.

Project Examples

Examples of project types (should not be viewed as exhaustive lists of eligible project types):

- Water Transactions (e.g., changes to a stream’s hydrograph through lease, transfer, or seasonal exchange of water)
- Acquisition of water from willing sellers – permanent and long-term (not less than 20 years) dedications for the purpose of instream flow
- Habitat restoration projects (e.g., weed eradication, wet meadow restoration, restoration of entrenched streams, upper watershed restoration or forest thinning) that reshape stream hydrograph.
- Planning studies requiring CEQA compliance, permitting, and engineering for specific projects
- Studies to evaluate instream flow needs, identify priority streams and watersheds, or evaluate habitat suitability and temperature needs
- Water efficiency generally – Irrigation efficiency and water infrastructure improvements (e.g., diversion, conveyance, and on-farm projects) that save water and enable reshaping of the stream hydrograph
- Reconnecting flood flows with restored flood plains
- Capital outlay projects that allow reservoir operations both at existing and new storage sites

ACTION REQUESTED: Approve, modify or deny request for letter issued by the Coordinating Committee in support of the BCRC D Grant Application (draft letter attached)



**BUTTE COUNTY FEDERAL/STATE LAND USE
COORDINATING COMMITTEE**

**7 COUNTY CENTER DRIVE
OROVILLE, CA 95965**

September 30, 2020

John Donnelly
Executive Director
Wildlife Conservation Board

Dear John Donnelly,

The Butte County Federal/State Land Use Coordinating Committee (Committee) is writing to support Butte County Resource Conservation District’s (BCRC D) application for 2020 Stream Flow Enhancement Program grant to complete meadow restoration planning and CEQA for the Butte Creek House Ecological Reserve. The Committee is charged with advising the Board of Supervisors on current public lands management issues, and functions under the Brown Act for public meetings.

The Butte Creek House Ecological Reserve is a 320-acre property that contains a degraded wet-meadow and brook trout fishery that lies at the headwaters of Butte Creek. This meadow also helps support one of only three Central Valley Streams containing a self-sustaining population of spring-run Chinook Salmon. Additionally, the Butte Creek House Ecological Reserve also provides habitat for listed species (sandhill crane, willow flycatcher, cascade frog, Sierra-Nevada yellow legged frog, spotted owl, and northern goshawk).

Restoration of this meadow will improve aquatic and terrestrial habitat for native species that depend on meadow habitat. Other meadow restoration projects have demonstrated that a restored meadow can result in an increase in water storage capacity, reduced water temperatures in summer, higher dissolved oxygen levels, reduced erosion and sediment delivery, and increased carbon storage.

In conclusion, the Committee strongly supports the efforts of BCRCDC to seek funding for meadow restoration for Butte Creek House Ecological Reserve.

Sincerely,

cc: Butte County Board of Supervisors
Butte County Forest Advisory Committee
Butte County Resource Conservation District



Butte County Board of Supervisors

25 County Center Drive, Suite 200
Oroville, California 95965

T: 530.552.3300
F: 530.538.7120

www.buttecounty.net/administration

Members of the Board

Bill Connelly | Debra Lucero | Tami Ritter | Steve Lambert | Doug Teeter

September 29, 2020

Ms. Kimberly D. Bose, Secretary
Federal Energy Regulatory Commission
888 First Street, N. E.
Washington, D.C. 20426

Re: Poe Hydropower Project (Project P-2107)

Dear Ms. Bose:

The Butte County Board of Supervisors (Board) respectfully submits the following comments in response to the letter submitted by Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) in relation to the Poe Reach Trail Feasibility Study (Feasibility Study), submitted on July 30, 2020. The letter was submitted to the Federal Energy Commission (FERC) to satisfy the requirements of Article 407 of the Poe Hydroelectric Project (Project) licenses (FERC No. 2107). The letter included the Feasibility Study (referenced as Attachment A in the PG&E letter) which assessed the feasibility of the Bardees Bar Trail and the Poe Reach Hiking Trail. The Board disagrees with PG&E's conclusion that the Bardees Bar Trail is not of high recreational value and would be a significant challenge to build and maintain. Our position on the Poe Reach Hiking Trail is one of strong support for its construction and recreational value.

Butte County has been involved in regular meetings with stakeholders in development of the PG&E Poe Project - Recreation Management Plan since the Project was initiated. In addition to participation in the meetings, draft plans and the Feasibility Study have been shared at public meetings held by the Butte County Forest Advisory and Federal/State Land Use Coordinating Committees. There has been strong public support for all of the improvements to recreational facilities as part of the proposed Project.

The Board wishes to express disappointment that, despite the ongoing collaboration and frequent meetings with PG&E to discuss the recreational plans, the objections as stated in the PG&E letter were not discussed with stakeholders in any good faith attempt to either factually support PG&E's assertions or resolve the perceived challenges prior to taking a position on the feasibility of the Trail in a letter to FERC.

Upon review of the Feasibility Study completed by the Butte County Resource Conservation District (BCRCD), the Board believes the PG&E letter provides a mischaracterization of the feasibility of construction and maintenance of the Poe Reach Hiking Trail (Trail) and understates the value of the Trail to local communities. The Board takes the position that the Trail is both feasible as stated in the Feasibility Study, and an important hiking trail for recreationists enjoying the beauty of the Feather River Canyon, as well as enhancing opportunities for fishing, picnicking and swimming.

PG&E cites high costs of construction as reasoning for infeasibility of the Trail. Upon review of the budget provided in the feasibility study, the associated costs are minimal compared to the other recreational projects in the licenses. PG&E characterizes the Study's cost estimates as generic but, in reality, BCRCO has extensive recreational trails experience and worked with a contractor who is a member of the Professional Trail Builders Association to provide real-world estimates. The alternative budget provided by PG&E does not reference how and who collected the data to support the alternative budget numbers.

The most concerning comment in the PG&E letter relates to the "low recreational value" of the project. Butte County relies on outdoor recreation as a key economic driver and trails based recreation has been identified as a key driver of increasing economic development in Butte County. This area of the Feather River Canyon has documented historical and cultural value, and has been frequented by local recreationists for many years.

The Feasibility Study delineates challenges to the project, which is the purpose of a feasibility study; however, PG&E attempts to manipulate the closing statement (see below), stating the study does not address the feasibility of development. Upon review of the Feasibility Study, you will find the challenges are appropriately noted and addressed, providing justification for the development of the trail.

"While there are a number of difficult challenges associated with the construction and maintenance of the Poe Hiking Trail the backdrop is stunning and allows for a valuable recreational trail experience that provides amazing vistas and access to the North Fork of the Feather River. Currently there are a limited number of managed recreational trails in a county where new recreational opportunities can serve as a catalyst for economic growth and improvement in the quality of life for Butte County residents."

In section IV of the PG&E letter, they state "proposed alignment of the trail does not correspond with any existing or historic trail". This is patently untrue; the Feasibility Study clearly shows that the proposed trail alignment utilizes sections of an historic trail. Additionally, the Plumas National Forest has stated its support of development of the hiking trail, referencing and supporting and referencing volunteer work already completed by a retired USFS employee to improve the existing historic trail. There are a number of stakeholders who have expressed strong support for the value of the Trail, including American Whitewater and the California Sportfishing Protection Alliance.

PG&E also states that the Trail would have adverse impacts on private property; however, the Feasibility Study provides multiple options and mechanisms for working with the landowners to provide right-of-way for construction of the trail. It also provides alternative options for a loop trail if the landowners do not allow right-of-way for the trail.

The Feasibility Study addressed the need for environmental assessment to identify and protect natural resources. One of the significant costs associated with the budget was the use of bridges at stream crossings to limit impacts to sensitive species, including the Foothill Yellow Legged Frog. In addition, the Trail layout was focused on limiting hydrologic connectivity to any stream.

PG&E also states that portions of the Trail would be on Forest Services lands and would have to be designed to USFS trail standards. In review of the Feasibility Study, the proposed alignment provides adherence to USFS trail specifications for a Class 3 trail.

The most concerning element of the PG&E letter is the cost benefit ratio that is their main justification for not providing a schedule for construction of the Trail. The costs of the Trail construction are significantly less than other projects in the licenses, as well as trail projects that PG&E has completed through other FERC licenses. The value of the outdoor recreation economy in California is well documented, and this economy has historically been a key sector in Butte County. Labeling a Poe Hiking Trail as an incremental benefit grossly understates the value of trail based recreation to improve quality of life for Butte County residents, as well as the economic benefit that trails based recreation can bring to the local economy. There are active trails organizations throughout Butte County, including hiking, biking and equestrian use, not to mention local residents and visitors who frequent this area of the Feather River for fishing, swimming, birding, and to enjoy its peaceful and scenic beauty.

In conclusion, the Board strongly supports construction of the Poe Reach Trail as part of the Recreation Management Plan to satisfy the requirements of Article 407 of the Poe Hydroelectric Project (Project) licenses (FERC No. 2107).

Sincerely,

Steve Lambert, Chair
Butte County Board of Supervisors

cc: Steve Bauman, PG&E Sr. Relicensing Project Manager
American Whitewater
Butte County Federal/State Land Use Coordinating Committee
Butte County Forest Advisory Committee



**BUTTE COUNTY FEDERAL/STATE LAND USE COORDINATING
COMMITTEE**

**7 COUNTY CENTER DRIVE
OROVILLE, CA 95965**

September 30, 2020

Coye Burnett
Almanor Ranger District
900 E. Hwy 36
P.O. Box 767
Chester, CA 96020

RE: COMMENT - Yellow Creek Watershed Restoration #57968

Greetings, Coye:

The Butte County Federal/State Land Use Coordinating Committee (Committee) is writing in support of the Yellow Creek Watershed Restoration Project (Project). The Committee is charged with advising the Board of Supervisors on current public lands management issues, and functions under the Brown Act for public meetings.

The Committee believes that the restoration of meadow systems in the Sierra Foothills is critical to the water supply, and to the ecosystem sustained by these riparian areas, and also aids in controlling forested encroachment into these open areas. The Committee believes that meadows are also important to controlling wildfires by providing open space and wetlands to slow fire growth.

The Butte County Forest Advisory Committee (FAC), which reports to this Committee, discussed the Project at its meeting of September 28, and voted to recommend support. Additionally, the Project materials were reviewed by the FAC's Environment/Watershed representative, Trish Puterbaugh, who further stated support of this Project as being well-designed and important step to restoring the meadow ecosystems.

The importance of meadows and hydrological improvements to a healthy forest and to the water supply is well documented. The Committee strongly supports the Project and recognizes its beneficial importance.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



**BUTTE COUNTY FEDERAL/STATE LAND USE COORDINATING
COMMITTEE**

**7 COUNTY CENTER DRIVE
OROVILLE, CA 95965**

September 30, 2020

Deb Bumpus, Forest Supervisor
c/o Matt Cerney, District Culturist
Lassen National Forest Supervisor's Office
2550 Riverside Drive
Susanville, CA 96130

RE: COMMENT - West Shore Community Wildfire Protection Project

Greetings, Deb:

The Butte County Federal/State Land Use Coordinating Committee (Committee) wishes to reaffirm its support of the West Shore Community Wildfire Protection Project. The Committee is charged with advising the Board of Supervisors on current public lands management issues, and functions under the Brown Act for public meetings. The Committee sent a letter of support for the Project dated September 10, 2019 (copy attached).

In light of the devastating wildfires that are occurring in our state, and across the Western United States, the Committee believes this Project serves an urgent need, and should be implemented as soon as possible.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Peggy Monk".

Butte County Federal/State Land Use Coordinating Committee

CC: Butte County Forest Advisory Committee
Butte County Board of Supervisors
Butte County Chief Administrative Officer



BUTTE COUNTY FEDERAL/STATE LAND-USE COORDINATING COMMITTEE

7 County Center Drive
Oroville, CA 95965

September 10, 2019

Chris O'Brien
Lassen National Forest All Units
2550 Riverside Dr.
Susanville, CA 96130

RE: Letter of Support – West Shore Community Wildfire Protection Project

The Butte County Federal/State Land Use Committee (Committee) is writing in support of the West Shore Project in the Lake Almanor area. Many Butte County residents own property in the area and/or recreate there on a regular basis. Butte County's Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) member Patricia Puterbaugh has been regularly attending meetings of the South Lassen Watershed Group and has reported to the FAC and the Committee on the development of this project so important to the welfare of the forest and the community.

The Committee understands the primary purpose of the proposed West Shore Project is to reduce the risk of wildfire damages to human life and property in the wildland urban interface (WUI) areas of Prattville, Lake Almanor West, and Big Meadows communities by thinning overstocked conifer stands and reducing hazardous fuel loads. The project is designed to improve forest resiliency and the recreation experience through facilities improvements and access management.

The Committee agrees with stakeholder concerns about potential for loss of the very large, older trees that are healthy and vigorous, providing an attractive canopy for the campgrounds and trails as well as wildlife habitat in certain areas. The Committee asks that the project be evaluated for any opportunities to preserve such trees and consider increasing the canopy cover to 50% for wildlife areas that would not adversely impact the overall design and goal of the project.

The Committee is very supportive of this project overall. The need to protect the WUI and promote forest resiliency is paramount, and the area has been long overdue for upgrades to parking and campground improvements. The West Shore is heavily used by recreationists in the summer months and they will really benefit from many of the improvements outlined in the project documents.

Thanks for the opportunity to comment on this project. We look forward to seeing the wildfire protection and forest resiliency work implemented and the opportunity for Butte County's residents and all recreationists to visit and enjoy the enhanced facilities.

Sincerely,

Dennis Schmidt
Butte County Federal/State Land Use Committee

cc: Butte County Forest Advisory Committee
Butte County Board of Supervisors
Shari McCracken, Butte County CAO



**BUTTE COUNTY FEDERAL/STATE LAND USE
COORDINATING COMMITTEE**

**7 COUNTY CENTER DRIVE
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September 30, 2020

John Donnelly
Executive Director
Wildlife Conservation Board

Dear John Donnelly,

The Butte County Federal/State Land Use Coordinating Committee (Committee) is writing to support Butte County Resource Conservation District's (BCRCD) application for 2020 Stream Flow Enhancement Program grant to complete meadow restoration planning and CEQA for the Butte Creek House Ecological Reserve. The Committee is charged with advising the Board of Supervisors on current public lands management issues, and functions under the Brown Act for public meetings.

The Butte Creek House Ecological Reserve is a 320-acre property that contains a degraded wet-meadow and brook trout fishery that lies at the headwaters of Butte Creek. This meadow also helps support one of only three Central Valley Streams containing a self-sustaining population of spring-run Chinook Salmon. Additionally, the Butte Creek House Ecological Reserve also provides habitat for listed species (sandhill crane, willow flycatcher, cascade frog, Sierra-Nevada yellow legged frog, spotted owl, and northern goshawk).

Restoration of this meadow will improve aquatic and terrestrial habitat for native species that depend on meadow habitat. Other meadow restoration projects have demonstrated that a restored meadow can result in an increase in water storage capacity, reduced water temperatures in summer, higher dissolved oxygen levels, reduced erosion and sediment delivery, and increased carbon storage.

In conclusion, the Committee strongly supports the efforts of BCRCD to seek funding for meadow restoration for Butte Creek House Ecological Reserve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Peggy Moak". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a white background.

Peggy Moak
Butte County Federal/State Land Use Coordinating Committee

cc: Butte County Board of Supervisors
Butte County Forest Advisory Committee
Butte County Resource Conservation District
Butte County Chief Administrative Officer