

Lee Vining, FERC Project No. 1388

TERRESTRIAL AND BOTANICAL TWG 2 MEETING NOTES FEBRUARY 24, 2021; 10 AM - 12 PM PDT

**These meeting notes are documentation of general discussions from the meeting held on the above-noted date. These notes are not a verbatim account of proceedings, are not meeting minutes, and do not represent any final decisions or official documentation for the project or participating agencies.*

1. Attendees

Relicensing Team Members

Allison Rudalevige, Psomas
Brad Blood, Psomas
Carissa Shoemaker, ERM
Edith Read, ERA
Finlay Anderson, Kleinschmidt
Kelly Larimer, Kleinschmidt
Matthew Woodhall, SCE
Shannon Luoma, Kleinschmidt
Steve Norton, Psomas

Agencies and Interested Stakeholders

Alyssa Marquez, CDFW
Bartshe Miller, Mono Lake Committee (MLC)
Blake Englehardt, USFS
James "Jim" Erdman, CDFW
Monique Sanchez, USFS
Thomas Torres, USFS
Todd Ellsworth, USFS

2. Compiled Action Items

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- CDFW to send information on bighorn sheep in the area
 - CDFW to send the new Sierra Nevada red fox report when it becomes available
 - Psomas will send the USFWS dissertation about mark-recapture of Yosemite toad from UCSB, if publically available: *David Martin. 2008. Decline, Movement and Habitat Utilization of the Yosemite Toad (Bufo canorus): An Endangered Anuran Endemic to the Sierra Nevada of California.*
 - CDFW/USFS to provide the plans/documents regarding the translocation of Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog to the project vicinity
 - Relicensing team and USFS to confirm that everything USFS intended to share with us was received (e.g. rare and invasive plants data, high priority species list)
 - Relicensing team to delete the USFS Bishop Creek comments from 2018 that are included currently in the study requests list
 - Peak flow study – keep on table for future discussion

3. Welcome, Introductions, Review of Notes and Other TWGs' Potential Studies

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- Matthew Woodhall provided a Safety moment
 - Introductions of team and all participants via the chat window
 - Review of notes/comments from January

- No comments or questions received
- Finlay Anderson listed the potential studies / study requests that are being discussed in the other resource TWGs. SCE intends to make sure that on an ongoing basis, the subject matter experts for each TWG are communicating with each other so that TWGs can ensure that interdisciplinary objectives are covered.
 - USFS agreed that aquatic invasive species should be addressed in Aquatics TWG.

4. Discussion of Resource Management Objectives / Potential Study Requests

- Relicensing team reviewed each potential study request received to date
- **Riparian community / black cottonwood study**
 - Comment: Relicensing team
 - The elevation at the project may be too high for black cottonwood, it has not been documented it in the basin during the relicensing monitoring. There is no abundance data available for black cottonwood in the project area.
 - Comment: CDFW
 - This request was copied from Bishop Creek, so it may not apply to Lee Vining Creek.
 - Comment: USFS
 - Why are there no riparian monitoring sites in the lower reaches?
 - Response: Relicensing team - The farther downstream you go (e.g., Glacier Creek and downstream of Slate Creek), the harder it is to determine what is natural versus project-related influence. Accretion flow increases in this area, which is why the sites were limited. We believe the three chosen monitoring sites are representative of the conditions of Lee Vining Creek.
 - Comment: USFS
 - I think there are cottonwood in the lower reach. I would like to visit the site to see. The lower portion may be more disturbed/susceptible to project influence. It seems that the lower reaches would be more affected by development. I'd like to leave the Riparian study as a question mark and keep discussing it.
 - Comment: CDFW
 - I agree with USFS, I was surprised that there were only 3 sites and concerned that they might not be enough to get an understanding of the project. We should continue to consider this study.
 - Comment: Relicensing team
 - There are 3 sites, with 4 transects each (12 total transects). The next round of monitoring is this year in July/August.
 - Comment: MLC
 - If there is a peak flow impairment study it would include the system downstream. That could have impacts on riparian systems downstream to LADWP's diversion point.
 - Response: Relicensing team - We're trying to separate baseline impacts to operations impacts. We need to assess them based on our studies and

knowledge of the system how the future ops will affect resources. We will also update the project's environmental management to current land management objectives and standards. As far as a peak flow study goes, let's think about how that would work. I don't think there is a proposal to change Edison's operations at this point. Let's keep a peak flow study on the table and figure out what that would mean.

- **Invasive Plants**
 - Comment: Relicensing team
 - Aquatic invasive plants (e.g. Didymo and milfoil) will be addressed in the Aquatics TWG
 - Comment: USFS
 - We need to ensure that recreation sites are assessed for terrestrial invasive plants.
 - Comment: USFS
 - The study request from USFS overlap with what we have already included from CDFW.
- **Wildlife**
 - Comment: Relicensing team
 - The currently proposed wildlife study would not specifically target mule deer (specific to Bishop Creek because of wildlife crossings), willow flycatcher (include in general habitat assessment), goshawk specific (no known occurrences), or bats (bat habitat assessment was specific to Bishop Creek because there were known bats in the powerhouse; no known occurrences in Poole Powerhouse).
 - Comment: Relicensing team
 - Raptor habitat and mesocarnivores would be covered in the general wildlife study.
 - Comment: CDFW
 - CDFW's wildlife program has more info on bighorn sheep in the area. I can provide this info to the team. Sierra Nevada red fox report is in the works and should be coming out too, I will provide to team when it's available.
- **Yosemite Toad**
 - Comment: CDFW
 - We know Yosemite toad is in the area, there have been decent number of studies, but are old. This study is proposing to look at inlets and outlets to see if we can figure out where they are, since we don't know for sure. All life stages would be assessed. Also, a mark-recapture study is requested.
 - We have data from Saddlebag and Ellery lake that is 15 years or older, that Yosemite toad is using the areas for breeding. Data shows larvae only (not adults), which are easier to detect because they stay in one place. We are hoping to do a long-term mark-recapture study here and in the broader area to figure out where they are and what they're doing. Swabbing for Bd/Chytrid fungus would be good as well.

- Comment: Relicensing team
 - The USFWS has dissertation about mark-recapture of Yosemite toad from UCSB, this may answer some of the questions you have. Psomas will find this report and send it out to CDFW, if publically available. It is referenced in the conservation strategy for Yosemite toad.
- Comment: USFS
 - Thanks to CDFW's Jim Erdman for being on the call to speak for the toad. I have the same concerns about the Yosemite toad. Is a mountain yellow-legged frog study needed here?
 - Response: CDFW - We feel we have enough data about the Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog that a study isn't needed. This summer, frogs may be relocated from Yosemite NP to Maul Lake [southwest of Saddlebag Lake], this project was funded and scheduled but paused because of Covid-19. The Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog is expected to be in Saddlebag watershed in 2021.
- Comment: CDFW
 - There is only one study saying Yosemite toad are not eaten by brook trout because they are unpalatable. We base stocking on their use of ephemeral ponds not the lake itself. It would be a good idea to reassess all of the toad sites and get a handle on their population.
 - Response: Relicensing team - The challenge is to determine the project nexus rather than the academic reasons for the study. May be hard to tie this to the project. We would like to be careful about ensuring that scope of data collection efforts around the Yosemite toad is commensurate with the potential regulatory needs, also keeping in mind that the baseline condition is the current operations.
- Comment: Relicensing team
 - Can we get the plans/documents regarding the translocation of Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog?
 - Response: USFS - I have the proposed action for the translocation and can share the plans with CDFW's permission. It is in the special use permitting process right now.
- **Riparian Birds**
 - Comment: CDFW
 - The study doesn't necessarily need to be called 'focal', it's more of a general riparian bird study. I still intend to discuss this with specialists, this is a study that is often overlooked in FERC projects. The nexus is that operations impact hydrology, which impact riparian vegetation, which impacts the essential habitat. It could be combined with other riparian studies. Is there suitable habitat for these species in the FERC boundary? Often the riparian birds need a two-tiered habitat structure. Trying to get a baseline of what is out there. The existing studies are downstream in the LADWP area.
 - Comment: Relicensing team

- What would we consider the baseline? This project has been here as it is for a long time (1960s), so that would be our baseline for looking at operations. We would struggle with an impacts assessment that compares impacts with a natural hydrograph. However, there's a lot here that we can accommodate in a general wildlife survey.
- Response: CDFW – The dams change the hydrograph, just using it as an example. Not necessarily need to compare to the hydrograph. Can use ERA's previous data to compare. I agree that we need to talk about this study more to find nexus and determine the level of effort needed.
- Comment: Relicensing team
 - ERA has been looking at the trend line of how vegetation is doing under existing operations, riparian bird discussion is based on habitat, ERA's studies would help with that. Downstream of Slate Creek is tricky, because natural vs Edison's impacts is harder to determine.
- Comment: USFS
 - In the agenda I saw something about wetlands and floodplains, were there study requests for those?
 - Response: Relicensing team – No study requests have come in for wetlands and floodplains. Yes, they were listed in the agenda as a topic covered in this TWG. The FERC regulations require that the environmental reports cover known information, but if sufficient information exists to characterize the resource and there are no questions about project operations, this is sufficient.
- Comment: Relicensing team
 - Can we get the list of USFS high priority species from USFS? And the rare plant and invasives data as well?
 - Response: USFS – Yes, I thought I sent it. We need to make sure everything I intended to send made it to your team. And you can delete the Bishop Creek comments from 2018 that I sent.

5. Schedule & Next Steps

- Relicensing team will review the requests in further detail, brainstorm, and come back for next TWG with some clearer outlines and questions for TWG.
- We still need to determine how detailed we will describe each study in the PAD. If we have areas of disagreement we will surface those sooner than later.
- Additional action items are underlined above.

6. Upcoming TWG Meetings

Aquatics 3	March 29, 2021 10am
Terrestrial 3	March 31, 2021 10am
Cultural and Tribal 3	March 31, 2021 1:30pm
Recreation and Land Use 3	April 1, 2021 10am