

California Department of Parks and Recreation
Gold Fields District
Auburn SRA

Public Access, Use and Facilities

associated with the

American River Pump Station/River Restoration Project

The American River Pump Station Project is located on the North Fork of the American River at the Auburn Dam site within Auburn State Recreation Area. The project has three objectives: 1.) To provide permanent facilities for the Placer County Water Agency (PCWA) to convey its water entitlement to the Auburn Ravine Tunnel; 2.) To eliminate the safety issue with the Auburn Dam bypass tunnel; and 3.) To restore the river to its pre-construction channel to allow all of the beneficial uses of the river in what is now a de-watered channel, including recreation, navigation, fish passage and other beneficial uses. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) and Placer County Water Agency (PCWA) are the lead agencies for this project. This project was analyzed and approved through the American River Pump Station Project Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report which was completed in June 2002.

Project Background

Prior to the initiation of the construction of Auburn Dam, PCWA built a pump station on the NF American River to deliver water to the Auburn Ravine Tunnel and the PCWA service area. As part of the Dam construction the Reclamation entered into an agreement with PCWA to provide an interim pumping facility until the Dam was completed and PCWA could divert their water entitlements by gravity from the proposed Auburn Reservoir. Seasonal pumps (removed in the winter) were installed in the Canyon by Reclamation to allow PCWA to take water. This interim solution does not allow PCWA to take it's full water entitlement and annual installation and removal of the pumps became an expensive operation. In 1994 the Reclamation began to study installation of a permanent pump station for PCWA and concepts to restore the Auburn Dam Site.

In 1999, the California State Attorney General sent a letter to the U.S. Secretary of the Interior requesting the federal government close the diversion tunnel and re-water the river channel to allow for all beneficial uses of the river. Reclamation and the California Resources Agency entered into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) regarding the project. This MOA specifies closure of the tunnel and restoration of the river channel as part of the project (so as to allow for all pre-dam construction beneficial uses) and would include a public access component. The MOA is specific about the type and location of public access to be provided as part of the project.

Public Access Component of the Project

Currently the river is closed to public recreation use ½ mile upstream and ½ mile downstream from the Auburn Dam Site by a California State Parks (DPR) posted order due to the hazard that the diversion tunnel presents to boaters and other river users. With this hazard eliminated, DPR and Reclamation would no longer prohibit use of this section of river. DPR believes this stretch of river has the potential to be very popular. The character of the run is Class II to easy Class III. This level of difficulty is suitable for a wide range of boating skills.

River users will access the river at the Confluence area near the Highway 49 crossing. Currently, the next nearest public access point downstream is Rattlesnake Bar on Folsom Reservoir, 9 miles downstream from the confluence. Typically there are 2-5 miles of flatwater between the tunnel outlet and Rattlesnake Bar. Agency managers assume this river use would primarily occur in April through September. During the summer, river levels are controlled by releases from Oxbow Dam and Powerhouse. During this time period the river flows vary between the minimum flow of 2-300 cfs and the typical summer releases of 1000-1200 cfs. The releases occur in the morning at Oxbow and don't arrive to the confluence until mid to late afternoon. Therefore, under the current flow regime, DPR projects that river use will have a relatively short window of opportunity in the late afternoon for the primary use season.

Because of the typical short window of opportunity for boatable flows late in the afternoon, the potential popularity of the reach and the amount of flatwater involved in getting to Rattlesnake Bar, DPR managers were concerned about river users becoming stranded or having to finish their trips in the dark on Folsom Reservoir. To safely and effectively accommodate and manage this new river recreation use, public access facilities have been included as part of the Pump Station project.

Proposed Access Facilities

The public access component of the Project includes providing limited vehicle access into the canyon via Maidu Drive. An entrance station will be constructed at the intersection of Maidu Drive and one of the primary paved construction roads down into the canyon. Just outside of this entrance station a small paved parking area will be constructed to serve trail users when the entrance station is closed. Trail users currently park at this location, and the parking lot will formalize this use.

A paved parking lot for 53 vehicles and CXT style vault restroom will be constructed at the old cement batch plant site approximately 2/3 of the way down into the canyon. This will be the primary parking area for vehicles. Two river level turnaround drop-off/pick-up points with handicapped parking spaces will be constructed to provide access for river users picking up equipment, one at the existing construction road crossing in the Auburn Dam site and one at Oregon

Bar downstream of the Dam site. Improvements will be made to existing construction roads that will be used as the routes to provide vehicle access to the parking area and turn-around areas. Because the access road to Oregon Bar is currently used by trail users, an alternate pedestrian/equestrian trail route has been constructed between the Oregon Bar turn around and the batch plant parking area to prevent conflicts between vehicles and trail users. Gates and signing will be installed along these access routes and parking areas to prevent vehicular access from undesignated areas.

Management of Recreation Use

During the EIR/EIS for the Pump Station Project, there was a lot of concern about providing vehicle access down into the Canyon. These concerns included, traffic and public safety on roads (Maidu), increased visitor use, increased wildfire potential, and changes in the visitor experience in the Canyon.

In the EIR/EIS DPR explained how the site would be managed to minimize these potential impacts. Vehicle access would only be permitted when the station was staffed. The number of vehicles permitted into the area would be limited to the number of parking spaces available (53). Only day use would be permitted, no camping, fire rings or picnic facilities are proposed. DPR would prohibit alcohol and open fires in the new access area. The area would be closed and gated at night.

In the Pump Station EIR/EIS, DPR acknowledged that due to the staffing limitations of the SRA and the additional staffing burden that the new entrance station and vehicle access, DPR may only be able to provide for vehicle access seasonally and with limited number of days per week and hours per day. Trail users would have full year-round access to the area, as is currently the case.

Construction of the Pump Station has been completed. Work is currently underway to complete the diversion structure (fish and boater friendly), the river channel restoration and tunnel closure. Construction and development of the public access facilities has begun and will be completed over the next year. The entire project is expected to be completed by spring 2008.