HISTORICAL EVALUATION OF THE BURTON CEEK WATER SUPPLY DAM BURTON CREEK STATE PARK TAHOE CITY, LAKE TAHOE PLACER COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

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INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE

This report documents the recordation and evaluation of the Burton Creek Dam, located within Burton Creek State Park, Tahoe City, Placer County, California (Figure 1). The Sierra District of California State Parks proposes to remove the abandoned concrete diversion structure on Burton Creek. The dam is located on Lake Tahoe's west shore, inland about two miles north of Tahoe City.

In June 2018, Foothill Resources, Ltd. was retained by the Sierra District, California State Parks, to prepare a historical evaluation report on the 1907/08 Burton Creek Water Supply Dam at Antone Meadows. The purpose of the survey and report is to record and evaluate the Dam for its potential eligibility for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) under Section 106 of the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA). The resource has also been evaluated in accordance with Section 15064.5 of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) to determine if it is a historical resource eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources (CRHR). In addition, it was evaluated in accordance with Chapter 67 of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA) Code of Ordinances.

Burton Creek State Park was accepted into the State Park system in 1978 when lands were acquired by the California Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR). At that time, park lands included parcels on the Lake Tahoe shoreline at Skylandia, Lake Forest, and Star Harbor. Those parcels are now part of the Tahoe Recreation Area and are locally operated by the Tahoe City Public Utilities District (TCPUD). In 2008, in the process of implementing a general plan for possible future development of park facilities and facilitating the planned acquisition of an additional 960-acre parcel of undeveloped land owned by the California Tahoe Conservancy, the park was required to complete a management plan. The plan included an inventory of resources. Consulting Archeologist Susan Lindström was contracted by DPR to conduct an archaeological survey and prepare a historic context of the Park (Lindström 2008).

The Burton Creek Dam, which formerly provided water to D.L. Bliss's Tahoe Tavern at Tahoe City, was one of the resources identified. The dam was originally recorded in 1988/1990 by California State Parks (Woodward, McAleer, and Nesbitt 1990). In 2008, archaeological research was conducted and a historic context of the Burton Creek State Park and Antone Meadows Dam was prepared by Dr. Lindstróm, and the reader is referred to that document for an in-depth history of the park and dam (Lindström 2008).

As no historical evaluation of the dam had been conducted, Architectural Historian Judith Marvin conducted an architectural survey and recorded the dam on June 20, 2018. The dam was surveyed, photographed, and updated DPR 523 forms were prepared. No additional archival research was performed; information for the evaluation was obtained from Woodward et al. (1990) and Lindström (2008).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The purpose of this project is to remove the existing compromised dam on Burton Creek at Antone Meadows (Figure 2), restore the meadow wetland and stream upstream of the dam, and build a rock step pool transition to tie the restored meadow to the downstream channel. The goal is to restore geomorphic function and form to the meadow and channel.

The dam was constructed to store water for a pre-1914 water right that is now held by the Tahoe City PUD (TCPUD). The TCPUD is interested in relocating their water right to Lake Tahoe, which would then allow California State Parks to remove the dam and restore the site. The dam is made of concrete and is approximately 68 feet long, 2 feet wide, and 5 to 6 feet tall. It was constructed at a natural grade break in

the valley between the very low gradient broad valley meadow upstream and the rocky, steeper and narrower valley downstream. The dam is in poor condition, leaking from both the face and beneath the dam and there is a well-developed side channel that has end-run the southern end of the dam (Figure 2).

There does not appear to be any significant sediment aggradation upstream of the dam. The bare earth image (Figure 3) shows that the excavated pool is still clearly visible, extending approximately 100 feet upstream. The backwater from the dam extends approximately 400 feet upstream in high water (Figure 4), submerging the meadow vegetation and channel. In low water however, the pool only extends about 100 feet and the intake cage and low water channel are exposed (Figure 5).

A berm exists on both sides of the meadow, but is much more substantial on the north bank. It is clearly visible in the bar earth image and LiDar. The berm is overgrown with a dense thicket of Lodgepole pine. The north berm would be removed and the material likely would be exported because it would be mostly root wads. Removal of the berm would allow reconnection of the isolated wetland north of the berm with the main meadow.

The project would remove the concrete dam. A step pool boulder structure would be constructed extending approximately 150 feet upstream and downstream of the dam, re-creating the natural valley grade break, and would control the water level at approximately the level shown in the low pool elevation photo. This would ensure that the meadow upstream remained saturated but not drowned. The excavated pool area upstream of the dam would be filled to meadow elevation to reconstruct the floodplain. A channel would be constructed to tie the upstream remnant channel above the dam to the downstream step pool channel, tying in just upstream of the bridge. The meadow floodplain would be revegetated with native sod plugs.

Short temporary roads would be constructed on both sides of the channel for access, and would tie into the existing road system adjacent to the bridge. The open parking area on the south side of the bridge would be used for staging. Although the flow would likely be less than 1 cfs during construction, de-watering will be required, including fish relocation from the construction reach (Walck 2017).

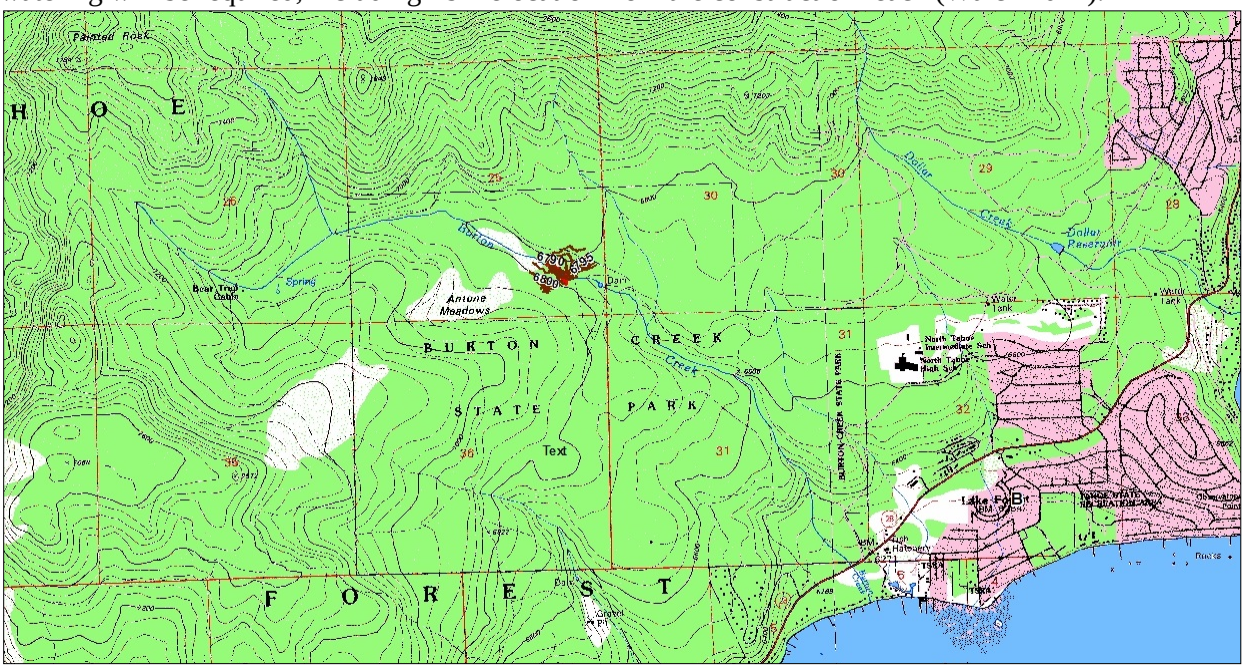

Figure 1. Location Map. Burton Creek State Park near Tahoe City. Project area shown in red.

Figure 2. Dam and end-run erosion.

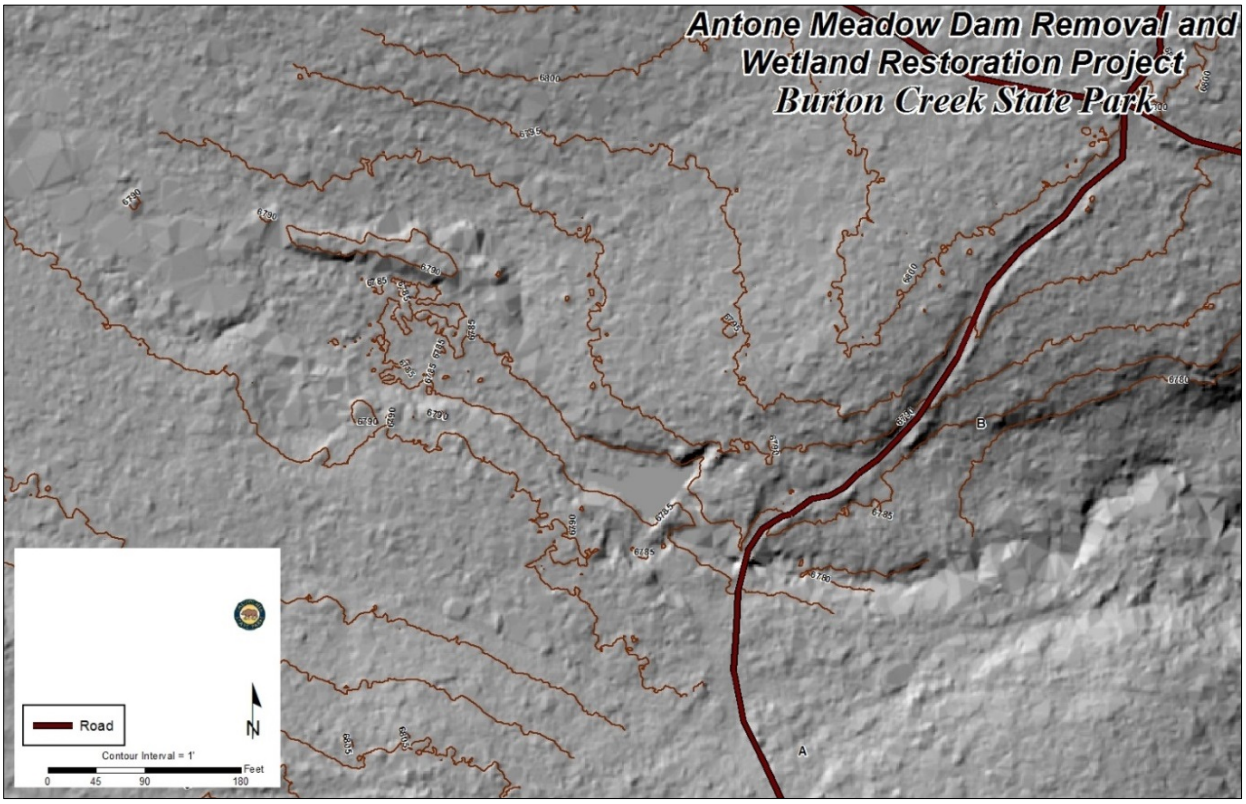

Figure 3. LiDar map shows dam excavation area and fill mounds.

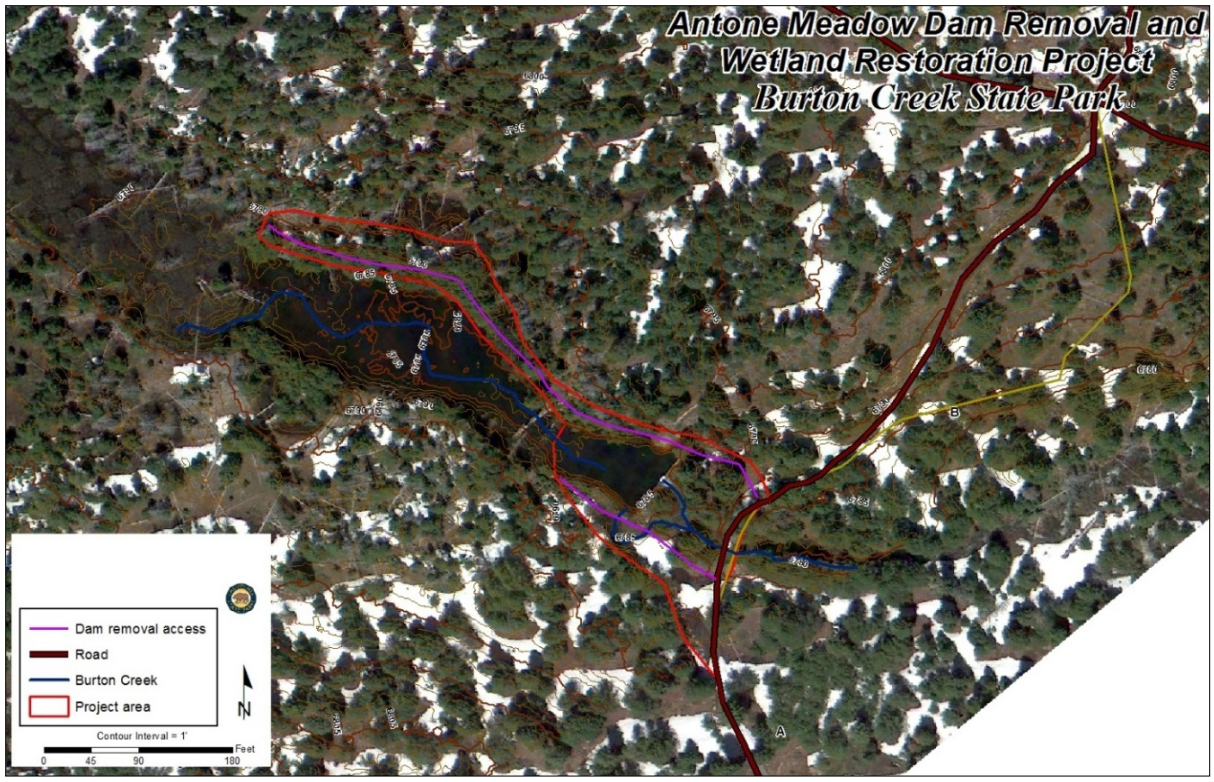

Figure 4. 2011 Google Earth image shows high pool extending 400 feet up the valley.

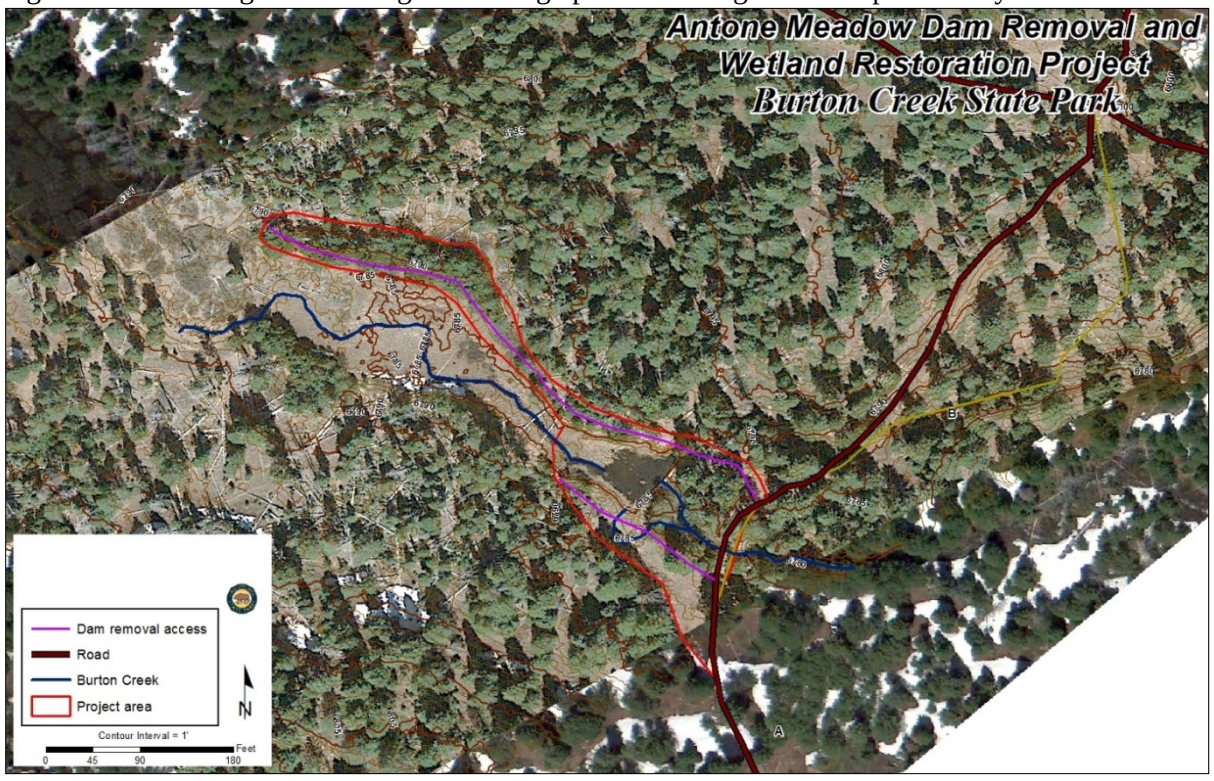

Figure 5. 2015 Google Earth image shows low pool extending only 100 feet upstream of the dam. A remnant channel is present from approximately 150 feet upstream of the channel, extending up valley. The project area is shown in red (approx. 0.9 acres), and temporary access roads in purple. Work would extend further up valley on the northeast bank in order to remove the large berm.

PROJECT AUTHORITY AND SCOPE

In compliance with antiquities guidelines established by the State of California and Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA), the project sponsor is required to consider potential impacts on heritage resources within the project area. Accordingly, a heritage resource study included an architectural assessment of the dam structure. The tasks are listed below:

(1) A preliminary investigation into previously published and archival materials relating to the history of the property and the project area.

(2) A field survey of the dam and project area to record the dam and other features.

(3) Preparation of a historical evaluation report, including a historical background; research on the dam and documentation of its physical appearance; photographs and synopsis of the key architectural and engineering features of the dam; and an evaluation of its eligibility for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), California Register of Historical Resources (CRHR), and as a historical resource under Chapter 67 of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA) Code of Ordinances.

FIELD METHODS

The architectural survey of the dam was conducted by Judith Marvin, Foothill Resources, Ltd. Ms. Marvin has over 35 years of experience conducting historical and architectural studies of buildings, dams, bridges, and other features for federal, state, local, and private agencies. On June 20, 2018, the dam was surveyed, recorded, and photographed, and DPR 523 Primary and Building, Structures, and Object forms were prepared. All measurements were taken from Woodward et al. (1990). Information on the history of the dam and project area was obtained from Lindström (2008).

NATURAL SETTING

The project area is situated in Antone Meadows on the middle reach of Burton Creek within its active channel and adjoining bank land. Project topography is gentle and elevations range around 6700 feet amsl. Vegetation is classified as Lodgepole Pine, White Fir, Eastside Pine, Aspen, Montane Riparian, West Meadow, and Riverine (Storer and Usinger 1971). Dominant tree species include Jeffrey pine, white fir, red fir, and Lodgepole pine. Much of the project area is covered by a dense riparian thicket of dogwood, willow, and alder. Soils in the area are described as ranging from fine sandy loam to gravelly sandy loam. Quaternary glacial deposits characterize the Burton Creek drainage channel. The remaining geologic formations are Pliocene volcanic pyroclastics, including basalts, granitics, and andesites.

In prehistoric times the area is thought to have supported a luxuriant growth of native bunch grasses. The most significant human modifications of the project vicinity include logging, grazing, and recreational activities (Lindström and Marvin 2005).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Lake Tahoe Basin

Located in Placer and El Dorado counties in California and Douglas, Washoe, and Carson City counties in the state of Nevada, Lake Tahoe is situated at an elevation of 6,228 feet in the Central Sierra Nevada. Traditionally, the area was home to the Washoe tribe for many centuries. The first non-Native American to visit the area was John C. Frémont, passing through Alpine County on his way to California in 1844, who first viewed the lake from a lofty summit in February of that year. Frémont named the lake Bonpland, for a noted French botanist. The official mapmaker of the new state of California named it Lake Bigler in 1853 after John Bigler, the third governor of California, and it appeared on subsequent maps under that sobriquet. In 1862, through the successful efforts of William Henry Knight, the more appropriate Washoe name for the lake, "Tahoe" (meaning "big water," "high water," or "water in a high place"), was adopted and used on the first general map of the Pacific States as published by Bancroft Publishing House in that year.

It was precious metals that provided the impetus for most of the early visitors to the Tahoe Basin. The discovery of gold on the American River in January of 1848 spurred would-be miners and entrepreneurs from virtually every country in the world to rush to the rich gravel bars on the rivers and tributaries of the Sierra Nevada foothills. The movement that ensued has been called one of the greatest mass migrations in human history, as thousands poured into the region in search of the elusive metal. Many of the "Argonauts" who came overland to the gold fields crossed the Sierras via Lake Tahoe, traveling either the Scott Route (later the Placer County Emigrant Road) on the north shore of the lake or the Placerville Road along the south shore.

Early development at the lake, however, was precipitated by the discovery of silver on the Comstock Lode in Nevada. The rich forest reserves of the Lake Tahoe basin were tapped to provide timbers for the ever-deepening mines around Virginia City and for the construction of homes and commercial enterprises in the surrounding communities. The rich placer diggings in the California gold country had been played out and the area was experiencing a depression; disillusioned gold miners rushed to the Comstock strike, again passing by Lake Tahoe on their return route.

Following the loggers were the recreationists, men who saw the possibilities of Lake Tahoe as a pleasure and health resort. Fishing and hunting were the earliest recreational pursuits, soon followed by boating, bathing in the hot springs, swimming, and gambling on the Nevada shore. Resorts were established at Lake Tahoe as fashionable summer retreats for the well-to-do. Some of the earliest resorts on the California side of the lake included the Lake House at Al Tahoe, Rubicon Point Lodge, Grand Hotel at Tahoe City, and the Bellevue Hotel at Sugar Pine Point (Woodward Architectural Group 1993:42-43). Due to the inadequacy of the roads in the Tahoe Basin, most travelers to the lakeshore resorts and cabins traveled to their destinations by steamer or sailboat, primarily the *Governor Stanford* and the *Tahoe*, each of which followed a set schedule, making stops at Glenbrook, Tallac, Emerald Bay, Carnelian Bay, and Brockway (Woodward Architectural Group 1993:44).

With the advent of the automobile in the twentieth century, the need for good roads became imperative. The first Rim of the Lake Road was completed in 1913, but was rudimentary at best. Increasing pressure from travelers and tourists, coupled with the passage of the Federal-Aid Road Act in 1916, provided the impetus for the State of California to upgrade the roads into the Tahoe Basin. During the mid-1930s the Lincoln and Victory coast-to-coast highways was completed and the Lincoln Highway (now State Route 50) became the major access to the basin. All the roads connecting Lake Tahoe to Nevada and California

had been paved by 1930 and by 1935 a passable auto route had been completed around the lake (Woodward Architectural Group 1993:44-45).

The development of a viable transportation corridor around Lake Tahoe, coupled with the popularity of the automobile, was to forever alter the character of the basin. The region was now readily accessible to the public, including the middle class, who created another rush to the area to camp, build modest cabins, and utilize the lakeshore for numerous forms of recreation. From the beginnings of tourism in the basin, however, the lakeshore was utilized almost exclusively during the summer months, with resorts and cabins opened on Memorial Day and shuttered on Labor Day.

However, in more recent years the Tahoe Basin has seen increasing use during winter months, especially since the development of Squaw Valley for the Winter Olympic Games in 1960 and the subsequent construction or improvement of numerous other ski resorts. Small, family-oriented, rustic cabins have given way to modern year-around subdivisions, the remodeling of older structures, and the demolition of many others, as present-day lake dwellers increase the size and usage of their properties.

In the mid-1910s, the first automobiles traveled to the Lake Tahoe Basin, with roads from California and Nevada paved in the 1930s. Most of those who came to the North Shore traveled over Highway 80. With better accessibility to automobile tourism and the general public, the old luxury hotels declined and were replaced by rustic summer cabins, auto courts, motels, cafes, and service stations (Marvin 2002).

Tahoe City

The first improvements at Tahoe City were made in response to the great silver discoveries in Nevada. In the summer of 1862, a three-man concern harvested a crop of timothy hay, the first commercial use of the area. Feed was in great demand for the livestock used in the harvest of timber for the Comstock mines, as well as for the teams who crossed the Sierra Nevada to the mines in Virginia City and environs, and the meadows around Lake Tahoe provided abundant fodder. Mining also accounted for first laying out the townsite, probably by miners from the Knoxville-Claraville mining excitement of 1863. With no successful mining prospects in the basin, Tahoe City soon became a lumbering center and was officially laid out in 1871.

Situated at the mouth of the Truckee River canyon, the town quickly became the most heavily populated community on the lake. The following year the first commercial establishment, the Tahoe House, was erected by William Pomin. After the Central Pacific Railroad was completed to Truckee, a wagon road was constructed to the lake, and an influx of tourists visited the new community. The Grand Hotel, built by A.J. Bayley (also spelled Bailey), was constructed to accommodate the expanding trade, and was the major hostelry in the area until it burned in 1895.

In the summer of 1864, James C. Chesroon built the first pier, 100 feet long, extending from the Tahoe Commons. Capable of accommodating large vessels, it became an important departure point for transshipment of freight for other lakeside locations. That same year, Augustus Pray launched his *Governor Blaisdel*, the first of many steamers that would ply the lake over the ensuing years. Lumbering, fishing, and some tourism were the primary enterprises carried on in the summer months, with only a few year-around folk in residence.

With the eventual decline of the lumbering industry in the Tahoe Basin, the Bliss family of Glenbrook turned their eyes to the development of tourism. Near the outlet of the Truckee River, in a stand of prime conifers, they planned a magnificent summer resort. Built by Duane L. Bliss at a cost of $150,000, the Tahoe Tavern was destined to be the center of the upper-class tourism industry on the lake from its completion in 1901 until it was demolished in the 1960s. Many of the buildings and materials at

Glenbrook were barged across the lake to the burgeoning community, the nucleus for the 20th century development of Tahoe City.

In order for the hotel and the tourism industry to develop, however, a comfortable transportation system was required. The Bliss family then began building a railroad, the Lake Tahoe Railway and Transportation Company, from Truckee to the Tahoe City Commons. Utilizing the rolling stock from their abandoned lines in Glenbrook and Bijou, the first train made the 15-mile trip in the spring of 1900. In 1901, the Glenbrook machine shops were barged across the lake to Tahoe City and the community became the major transshipment point for goods and materials delivered form the west (Hoover et al. 1990:258; Van Etten 1985:8-14, 24).

Burton Creek Dam Project Area

Early Ownership. The lands on which the Burton Creek Dam is located (South ½ Section 25, T6N. R16E) were patented to the Central Pacific Railroad (CPRR) on June 5, 1895. Although no record was found, the property appears to have been homesteaded by Antone Russi (Rossi) in the late 1880s. Russi died August 20, 1891, and his wife, Maria Wallace, married Frank X. Walker. On July 25, 1906, the estate of William S. Cothrin and Clark was ordered to convey Section 25 to Maria L. (Russi) Walker, excepting the timber. On November 26, 1906, Antone Russi's estate was conveyed to his widow Maria, and noted his six children, all prominent ranching and dairying families from El Dorado and Placer counties. They grazed herds and established dairies during the summer season in the Tahoe-Truckee basins before returning to their ranchlands in the foothills (Lindström 2008:6), and it is presumed they used Antone Meadows for grazing.

Tahoe Tavern Resort and Burton Creek Water Supply. Located on a knoll above the lake, one-half mile south of Tahoe City, D.L. Bliss's Tahoe Tavern was constructed in 1901 in conjunction with the Lake Tahoe Railway and Transportation Company's (LTRTC) narrow gauge railroad, both to cater to tourists who wished to visit the lake. Water for the resort, which rapidly expanded to include an annex in 1906, casino in 1907, and a golf course in 1917, was supplied from Burton Creek. From the beginning, with lake water contaminated by large steamers and watercraft, and insufficient water from the existing springs, the need for water to supply the Resort and the company town that supported the LTRTC line, became imperative. A supply was found in Burton Creek, an enterprise that involved the construction of two reservoirs and several miles of connecting pipeline to serve the area. Diverting the waters of Burton Creek, the pipe went overland to Bliss Creek and traversed via pipeline to the bottom of Grove Street, and from there followed the lake bottom in a gravity feed to the resort. An 8-inch iron pipeline, identified by Lindström in 2007, may represent a section of the Tahoe Tavern pipeline from Antone Meadows (Lindström 2008:26-27).

According to one account, the Bliss enterprise acquired water rights on Burton Creek and put in a dam at Antone Meadows in 1901. The date of dam construction was corrected to 1907 when the actual appropriation of Burton Creek was established under Application No. 12-3178, filed by the LTRTC. In a deed dated October 22, 1907 Frank X. Walker and his wife Maria L (Russi) granted a permanent right of way to the LTRTC for a water ditch from a point on Burton Creek in the SE ¼ of SE ¼ of Section 25, T16N, R16E, to run to Section 36 along the line of ditch survey. The deed also included the right to erect and maintain a small dam to fill the ditch (Lindström 2008:27, 29)

The water was to be conducted by ditch, pipe, and flumes to a point at or near Tahoe City to be used for mechanical power, agricultural, household, and fire purposes. The maximum appropriation was for 1.35 cfs, and also included irrigation water for the golf course. From the dam, water was conveyed in a wooden flume, later a steel pipe, to a dam on Bliss Creek, and then through an 8-inch pipe to the resort (Lindström 2008:27).

In a 1926 application for the appropriation of Burton Creek water, it was stated that a dam, flume, and ditch were constructed in 1908 of sufficient size to deliver and carry 130 inches (3.25 second feet) of water. After construction of the dam, flume, and ditch, the waters were conducted into a pipeline varying from 8 to 4½ inches in diameter (Lindström 2008:28).

As more and more water was required for the resort and golf course, the need for an additional supply was essential. The LTRTC then requested the right to increase the size of the dam to store more water for irrigation and power because in the preceding four years all the available water had been used in the latter part of the summer and they had to pump from the lake. In August, 1927, the Division of Water Resources conducted an inspection of the completed waterworks and stated that construction work had been completed and the diversion works had a maximum measured capacity of 1.34 second feet. Water from the diversion works were diverted into a re-regulating reservoir and into tanks, then diverted into penstocks for power purposes, industrial uses at Tahoe Tavern, swimming pool and domestic uses, irrigation and sprinkling uses at Tahoe Tavern and incidental domestic and industrial uses in Tahoe City (Lindström 2008:28).

In 1962, upon filing of a new application, the Burton Creek Dam was reinspected by the State Water Rights Board, and the dam was found to be practically the same as first described in the initial application by the LTRTC in 1907. The report went on to note that the dam had recently been repaired with concrete building blocks, necessary because a downstream property owner had removed a portion of the dam in an unsuccessful attempt to divert water at their property line. At that time the entire flow of Burton Creek was estimated to be about 1.2 cfs, except for minor leaking through the dam that was being diverted into the pipeline to Bliss Creek. Burton Creek's source of water was from four or five good springs on land owned by Mrs. Velma Clark, upstream of the dam and below Bear Trap Cabin (Lindström 2008:30).

In 1964, the Tahoe Tavern ceased operations and was demolished. The Tahoe Tavern Golf Course had been acquired by Carl Bechdoldt, Sr. and operated by his sons, Bill and Carl, Jr. Carl, Sr. died in 1976 and the operations were taken over by Carl, Jr. Irrigation waters for the golf course had come from Burton Creek since its beginnings (Lindström 2008:21).

Over the ensuing years since the original 1907 application, the waters of Burton Creek passed from the Bliss interests through a number of individuals and corporations, ending up with owners of the Tahoe Tavern and the Tahoe City Golf Course. In 1939, the Tahoe City Public Utilities District (TCPUD) was established to keep pace with the growing needs of the community. The Tahoe Tavern Resort connected to the District's water supply, and ultimately the TCPUD became successors in interest to the Tahoe Tavern properties and acquired an undivided interest to certain facilities that comprised the Burton Creek Water System.

In 1972, when the District was pondering the pros and cons of acquiring the system, the dam was described as one of its components, as was a 10-inch pipeline to Bliss Creek and other features. The concrete on the dam was noted as being badly spalled due to freeze-thaw cycles, and the condition was fair to poor. The wooden headworks were badly in need of repair and the reservoir averaged 24 inches deep. The system was deemed of little value to the District, as the water was of poor quality and the structures and conveyances beyond their useful life. It was recommended that the District quitclaim its interest in the system (Lindström 2008:32-33).

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Findings

Located on Burton Creek at the east end of Antone Meadows, the Burton Creek Dam was built in 1907/08 of board-formed poured concrete. In 1990, it was described as 68 feet long NNE-SSW (26 degrees/206 degrees); 5 feet high, silted in on the back side; and 2 feet wide on top (Figures 6, 7). A 4-inch galvanized pipe carried water from behind the dam, while the intake was in a metal cage about 10 feet northwest of the dam. The dam had been partially breached at its south end (Figure 9). A small notch near the center of the concrete dam formed a spillway (Figure 8). Rock and gravel fill was evident on the downhill side of the dam. The concrete was substantially deteriorated in places, with exposed steel rebar visible on the back side. The small holding pond behind the dam had a maximum depth of 2 feet, with a surface elevation 4 feet below the crest of the dam. The impoundment area covered 4½ acres (Woodward et al. 1990). When visited in June 2018, the only substantial change noted was that the dam was breached on the north end as well. An 8-inch riveted metal pipe (Figure 10) carried water southwesterly from the dam, and had been repaired. Wire nails were protruding from the face of the dam, suggesting they once held the board forms. Water was high, so the intake and the back side of the dam were not visible.

Conclusions

The Burton Creek Dam does not appear to be eligible for listing on the NRHP nor to be a historical resource for the purposes of CEQA or TRPA. Under Criterion A/1, although it is associated with the development of the Tahoe Tavern Resort and water impoundment in the Lake Tahoe Basin, it is not a significant contributor to those events, nor is it associated with any persons important in history (Criterion B/2). Under Criterion C/3, it is a typical example of a common resource type, not the work of a master, nor does it represent any advancements in engineering design or construction. It is also lacking in integrity, having been altered in 1926, again in the early 1960s, and no longer retains water, the purpose for which it was constructed. It does not appear to be able to answer questions important in history (Criterion D/4). No further work is recommended.

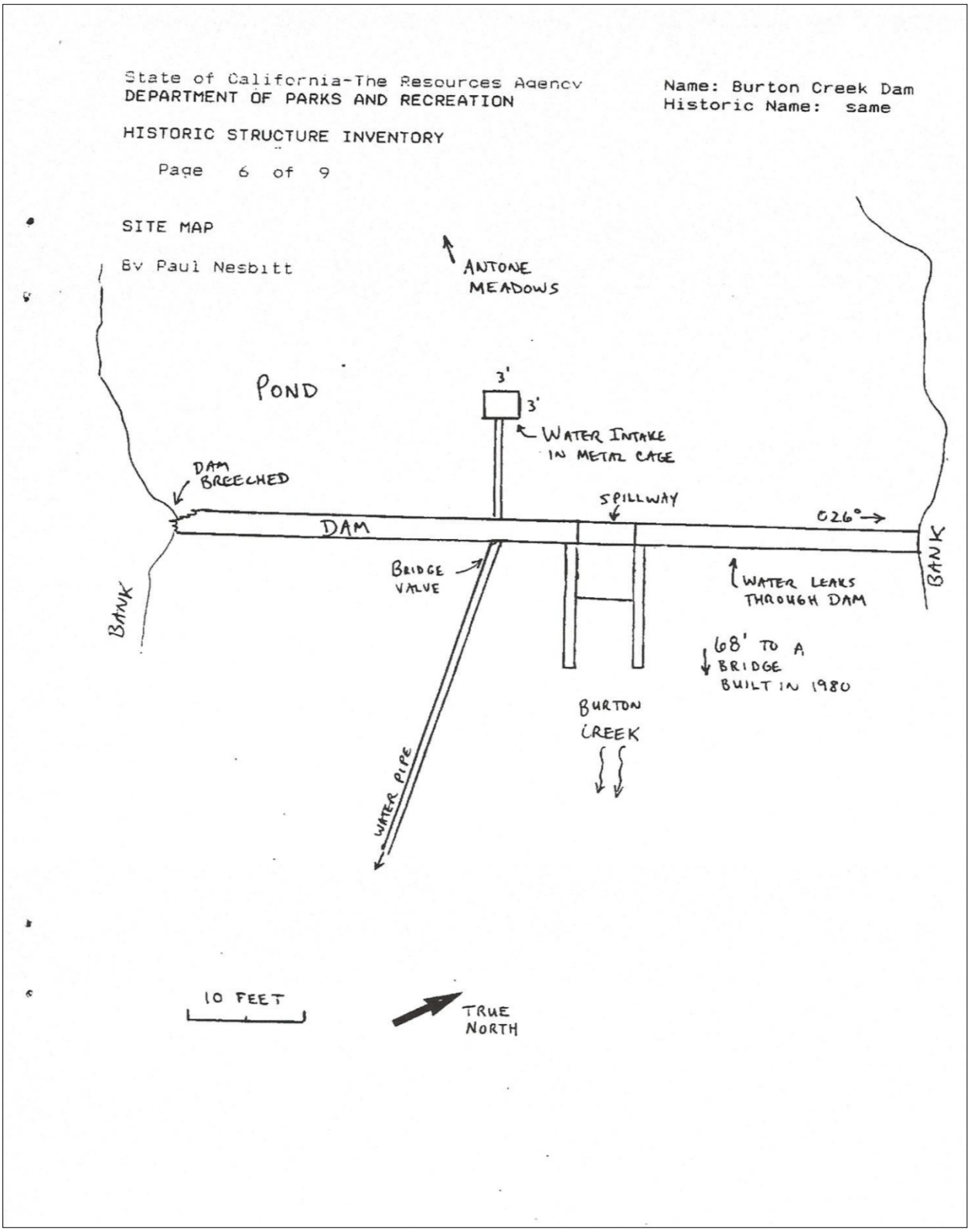

Figure 6. Sketch Map of Dam. Paul Nesbitt, in Woodward et al. (1990).

Figure 7. Dam, view southwest, June 2018

Figure 8. Spillway, view southwest, June 2018.

Figure 9. View north, June 2018.

Figure 10. Riveted pipe, with repairs, view south, June 2018.

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