

P.O. Box 5572  
Fresno, CA 93755

(209) 229-5808

Julie McDonald  
Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund, Inc.  
311 California Street, Suite 311  
San Francisco, CA 94104

12 March 1981

Dear Julie:

Re. San Joaquin Hydroelectric Project.

Thanks for the copy of Notice of Amendment (5 Feb 81) for project No. 2906.

It is our understanding that the amendment constitutes still one more addition to the Application for Preliminary Permit, and that the Upper San Joaquin River Water and Power Authority has not dropped anything from its application. I.e. the Application still calls for study of a possible major reservoir at Jackass Meadow (as opposed to the small diversion from Jackass Creek described in the latest amendment), as well as possible development of the Chiquito Creek drainage. We mention this point because we have heard from various sources (inc. John Boudreau and DFG people) that the Authority has lost interest in its original project (Jackass-Chiquito) and now feels that the Granite-Graveyard project (the amendment) is what it wishes to pursue. But, as long as nothing has been dropped from the Application, it seems to us we have to assume that they may wish to pursue development of any of these various projects.

If in fact they do wish to drop Jackass-Chiquito, and pursue just Granite-Graveyard, this may have less environmental impact. We are guessing that, based on the possibility that less meadow might be inundated, and that the major (Granite) reservoir would be in a less critical area from a recreational point of view. But we don't know these things, and we are sure that there would be a substantial impact even from the least harmful of the proposals. (A local DFG person says the project would have severe impacts on fish and wildlife, and some DFG people see it as a real disaster in the making.)

On the other hand, a major reservoir on Granite Creek might help to establish a definitive terminus for the roads into the area, thus providing a more defensible barrier against further road penetration to the east. A reservoir at Jackass Meadow would not have the potential for providing this fringe benefit. The road has been a major Sierra Club concern for many years, as you know.

It seems to us our main concern still lies with the diversion of the North Fork, and the questions that raises as to what type of access would be sought for study, construction, operation, and maintenance of the North Fork facilities. (We have always been told that access would be through the diversion tunnel, rather than on the surface, but we have also always been skeptical of that claim.) And the biggest concern of all may be that the Authority will wish

to divert more water from the North Fork than we would find acceptable. These concerns are not tied directly to the latest amendment, but perhaps they should be reiterated on this occasion just to reinforce the message.

In the middle of page two the Notice of Amendment states that "No disruptive testing or exploration is proposed." Presumably "disruption" lies in the mind of the beholder. We don't see how studies can be conducted without extensive field surveys, possibly including test drilling. Presumably survey access would be motorized; would it involve clearing of helicopter pads or construction of temporary roads? Would drilling be done or wouldn't it? It seems to us these questions should be raised, and that we try to hold the Authority and FERC to their claim that there would truly be "no" disruption of the present natural scene.

We are very concerned about the first paragraph on page three regarding competing applications. This refers to the West Side Development Project, No. 2968, as though it is an active proposal for which an application is on file. We had been led to believe (by copy of a letter from SCE to FERC) that SCE had withdrawn its application as part of an agreement with the Authority. Is it possible that SCE has reinstated its application, or is it just that FERC is behind on their paperwork? The former would be cause for great concern, as we remain far more opposed to dams on the main river than to diversion of the North Fork.

On this point, we should bring out something which some people seem to be unaware of. Every so often someone suggests that we should accept dams on the main river in order to avoid diversion of the North Fork. What this idea overlooks is that dams on the main river would not be in place of but rather in addition to diversion of the North Fork. SCE's West Side Project included dams on the main river (Miller and R Forks), plus diversion of the North Fork. The diverted North Fork water would have been held in a major reservoir on Granite Creek, then dropped into the main river to be held by the Forks reservoir. We would not only get dams in the areas where we find them most objectionable, but the North Fork would still be diverted.

On the other hand, the Authority's latest amendment proposes to drop the water stored on Granite Creek over to Graveyard Meadow, then to Mammoth Pool, thus bypassing the main river completely. This would seem to make dams on the main river less feasible than ever. This is one main reason why we feel the latest amendment may be the least of the evils.

Unfortunately we have not talked with John Boudreau lately, so have nothing to report from him. During the lame duck session of Congress we tried to get him to make contacts in support of Senate action on Burton's wilderness bill, since it seemed to us that the bill was in the Authority's own self-interest. But we are not aware that we convince Boudreau of that, and to our knowledge he took no action.

Many thanks for your good work on this intervention. We were

especially pleased with your handling of the Authority's request for rights to divert North Fork water. Your letter to the Division of Water Rights apparently established some new concepts in the whole process of granting water rights, and we felt your logic was irrefutable. Apparently others felt so too, judging by the fact that the whole process was modified drastically to meet the objections you had raised. Congratulations!

Sincerely,

George and Nancy Whitmore  
Tehipite Chapter

(In case you wish to phone me, I am away from home more than usual lately. The best time to try is still around 9:30 to 10:00 a.m.)