



PRESS RELEASE

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Regional Partners Submit Proposal to Preserve Potter Valley Diversion and Fish Passage Options

Potter Valley – The Mendocino County Inland Water and Power Commission (MCIWPC), the Round Valley Indian Tribes (RVIT), and the Sonoma County Water Agency (Sonoma Water) last week submitted a proposal to advance a regional solution for preserving flows in the Russian River and improving Eel River fisheries.

In the absence of this proposal, Pacific Gas and Electric Company’s (PG&E) decommissioning plan for the Potter Valley Hydroelectric Project (PVP) would include removing facilities that allow for water diversions to the Russian River. These water diversions have been vital to the Russian River basin for more than 100 years. The proposal is also important to assure that removal or modification of facilities allow for upstream and downstream fish migration at Cape Horn Dam, consistent with goals for a sustainable and harvestable Eel River fishery.

The New Eel-Russian Facility (facility) proposal submitted to PG&E would provide for the creation of a regional entity that has the legal and financial capacity to own, construct and operate a new water diversion facility near PG&E’s Cape Horn Dam on the Eel River. The yet-to-be designed facility would allow for ongoing water diversions through the PVP’s tunnel between the Eel River and Russian River, while allowing for upstream and downstream fish migration to support larger efforts aimed at achieving naturally reproducing, self-sustaining and harvestable native anadromous fish populations.

The regional solution proposal was submitted to PG&E in response to its decision to surrender its license for operating the PVP, and its requirement to receive a proposal by July 2023 from any entity interested in owning part the PVP facilities. PG&E’s schedule for filing a license surrender application and decommissioning plan calls for the utility company to complete an initial draft surrender application by November 2023, and a final draft surrender application by May 2024. The final application is required for submittal to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) by January 31, 2025.

The proposal seeks PG&E to include provisions in its final license surrender application that would allow the regional entity to preserve some of the water diversion components near Cape Horn Dam (which PG&E plans to remove) and obtain FERC approval for the regional entity to construct the New Eel-Russian Facility.

“Our goals are to restore the Eel River watershed from its degraded condition and to restore our salmon fishery to sustainable and harvestable populations. We join this proposal because it is one pathway to achieving these goals. We look forward to working with our partners in both the Eel River watershed and Russian River watershed and the environmental community to ensure that the decommissioning plan fully protects our Eel River fish and respects our federal fishing rights and water rights,” said Bill Whipple, President, Round Valley Indian Tribes Tribal Council.

“This is all about achieving a solution that honors the needs of all the ecosystems and communities within the region,” said Sonoma County Supervisor and Sonoma Water Director James Gore. “The train has already left the station in terms of decommissioning. Our proposal endeavors to improve the health of the Eel while preserving critical water diversions, at the appropriate times and levels, to the Russian River watershed.”

“The proposal that we submitted to PG&E benefits from the Two-Basin Solution Partnership and draws directly from technical studies and other work that the partners have undertaken together in recent years. We are very hopeful to find a pathway forward with these critical stakeholders” said Sonoma County Supervisor and Sonoma Water Director David Rabbitt.

“We have many details to consider, including the new diversion facility design, who will operate and maintain it and how it will be financed. We’re looking forward to ongoing work with stakeholders through the Planning and Working groups of the [Russian River Water Forum](#),” said Janet Pauli, chair of the MCIWPC.

“We are very grateful to Representative Jared Huffman, California Trout, allied conservation groups and Humboldt County for their leadership in advancing a regional solution,” said Grant Davis, Sonoma Water general manager. “The input received from multiple stakeholders was invaluable in developing this proposal.”

In a statement, PG&E said “PG&E has received the proposal from Sonoma Water, MCIWPC and RVIT about the Potter Valley Project and is reviewing it. PG&E has previously shared we would consider proposals for a third party to retain certain project features. We will have an initial draft Surrender Application and Decommissioning Plan available for review in late November.”

For additional information, go to <https://mendoiwpc.com/our-shared-water/> or <https://SonomaWater.org/RegionalPartnership>

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