

# ***THE POTTER VALLEY PROJECT:***

## *The Future Balance of Restoration and Reliability*

### **WHAT IS THE POTTER VALLEY PROJECT?**

- The Potter Valley Project is an trans-basin water diversion project between the Eel River Watershed and the Russian River Watershed.
- **1908:** The Project was completed to provide hydro-electric power to Ukiah in Mendocino County.
- **1922:** Scott Dam was completed to form Lake Pillsbury in order to provide a year round water supply to run the hydro-electric powerhouse.
- **1930:** PG&E purchased the Project and power license.
- **Renewable Energy:** The powerhouse has a **9.2 megawatt** capacity.
- **3 counties depend on water supplied from the Project:** Allocated water supports municipal, environmental, agricultural and industrial needs for **Mendocino, Sonoma and North Marin Counties.**
- An estimated **600,000 people** in the Russian River watershed depend on water from the Project.
- **Lake County benefits** through recreation, tourism, residence income, fire suppression and wildlife habitat related to Lake Pillsbury.
- Released water from the Project into the Upper Mainstem Eel River is used to **support environmental, recreational and water right needs.**

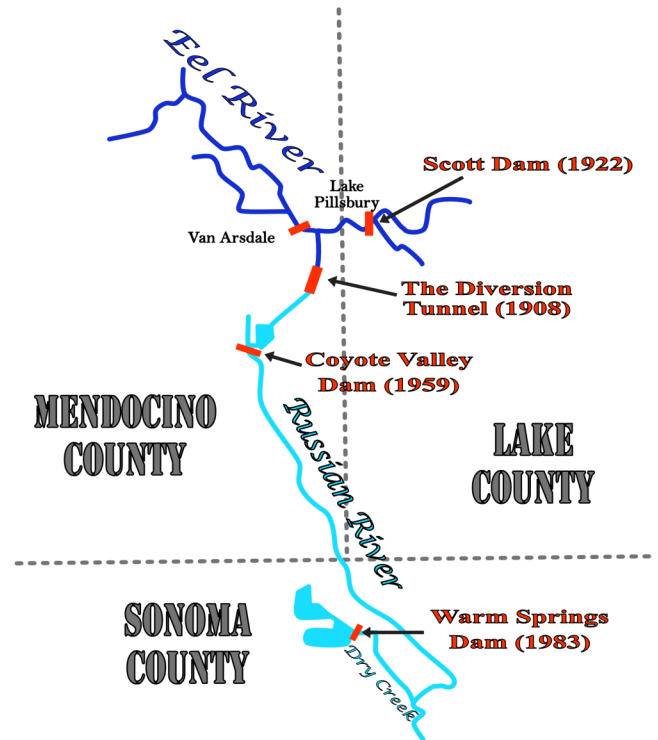


Lake Pillsbury

Picture: PG&E

### **WHY YOU NEED TO CARE?**

- After 88 years of ownership, PG&E announced on January 25, 2019 that they ceased all activities related to the relicensing of the Project. The **“orphaned” project** and related relicensing is now in the hands of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC).
- **Outcome unknown:** This is an unprecedented situation and no true “road map” to follow.
- It will be important to **maintain local control** of the Project to continue providing a crucial water source for the communities and environment that have developed around the water supply over the last 100+ years.
- **Reliable water storage** with year round supply is critical to adapting to drought years.



### **WHERE DOES THE WATER COME FROM?**

- **Headwaters located in Lake County:** The headwaters of the Upper Mainstem Eel River, Scott Dam and Lake Pillsbury.
- **Headwaters located in Potter Valley area of Mendocino County:** The Van Arsdale reservoir and Cape Horn Dam (original water holding facility from 1908), the diversion tunnel, the powerhouse and the head waters of the East Fork of the Russian River.



### **WHERE DOES THE WATER GO?**

- **From the Project:** water leaves the powerhouse and enters the East Fork of the Russian River and depending on the time of year, also provides water to the Potter Valley Irrigation District through a canal system.
- **From the Russian River East Fork:** ultimately flows into Lake Mendocino on the east side of Ukiah.
- **From Lake Mendocino:** Water that is released travels south in the mainstem of the Russian River, benefitting **over 11 communities** and 3 counties, until it flows into the Pacific Ocean at Jenner in Sonoma County.

## ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS OF THE PROJECT

- Habitat for migration, spawning and rearing of Chinook Salmon and steelhead: The Project flow regime releases water year round as specified by fishery agencies. (ESA, Section 7 Consultation).
- Current Project operations, with water flow releases adjusted on a daily basis, mimics the natural hydrograph in the Upper Main Eel River (Model Review, Congressman Huffman's Ad Hoc Committee).
- Project water is also used to meet minimum flow requirements in the East Fork of the Russian River and the Mainstem of the Russian River.
- Releases near the bottom of Lake Pillsbury from the needle valve provide cold water in the 12-mile-long reach between the Project dams from late spring through fall, which help sustain high-quality rearing habitat for juvenile Chinook salmon and steelhead. (PG&E PAD, 2017),
- 2,500 AF of water stored in Lake Pillsbury can be used for "block water" releases to enhance aquatic habitat for upstream and downstream fish migration as directed by the fishery agencies. (PG&E PAD, 2017).
- Van Arsdale Fisheries Station, at Cape Horn Dam, is the longest continuous record of fish return data (1933-current) in the entire Eel River watershed.



Scott Dam

Photo: PG&E and MCFB



## USEFUL FACTS

- The current storage capacity of Lake Pillsbury is 76,876 acre feet (AF) with a usable storage capacity of 66,876 AF. The volume of water storage is about 20% of the average annual runoff in the watershed above Scott Dam. (PG&E PAD, 2017).
- Below Scott Dam, the Eel River flows approximately 12 miles to Van Arsdale Reservoir, created by Cape Horn Dam. Cape Horn Dam has fish passage facilities, enabling salmon, steelhead, and lamprey to access the Eel River and tributary streams between Cape Horn and Scott Dam. There are no fish passage facilities at Scott Dam. (PG&E PAD, 2017).
- The Project was required to reduce diversions as part of a 2004 license amendment. Going from an average 160,000 acre-ft/yr. to 70,000 and 75,000 acre-ft/yr. (PG&E non-confidential summary, 2018).
- In analyzing data over a ten year period between 2007-2017, an average of 2% of the water available in the entire Eel River Watershed (based on gauge data) was diverted through the project into the Russian River watershed. This time frame included annual designations of extremely dry, dry, above normal, below normal and wet based on annual precipitation levels. (MCFB gauge data analysis).

## KEEP UP WITH THE RE-LICENSING PROCESS

### FERC:

- Final FERC re-licensing application deadline is no later than April 14, 2020 and the current license expires on April 14, 2022.
- FERC distributed a 'notice soliciting applications' with a 120 day **deadline of June 28, 2019** for applicants to submit a Notice of Intent (NOI) and a pre-application document (PAD).

### MCIWPC

- The Mendocino County Inland Water and Power Commission (MCIWPC) is moving forward to retain local control of this critical water source.
- MCIWPC is willing to work with local entities as needed to preserve local control of the Project.

- MCIWPC:

<https://www.mendoiwpc.com/AdHocCommittee>

- Congressman Huffman's ad hoc committee:  
<http://pottervalleyproject.org/>
- Congressman Jared Huffman has formed an ad hoc committee with invited stakeholders to look into options for operating the Project.
- One such modeling option that came from the ad hoc, is a run of the river scenario where Scott Dam is removed and water is only diverted through the Project during high flows.
- Fish passage improvement will need to be addressed in this licensing process, but there are a number of fish passage restoration options that need to be fully vetted prior to moving forward with any consideration of infrastructure removal.

### MCFB

- Members of Mendocino County Farm Bureau receive updates through e-letter and newsletter publications, non-members can visit: <https://www.mendofb.org/>



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