

***Mendocino County Russian River Flood Control &
Water Conservation Improvement District***

STAFF REPORT

**Agenda Item 5: Mendocino County Inland Water & Power Commission
Monday, March 4, 2024**

Background:

The Mendocino County Inland Water and Power Commission (IWPC) is a joint powers authority serving as stewards of the Russian and Eel River watersheds, safeguarding the water that plays such a vital role to the region's economic development, environmental quality, and general well-being of those who use this water. IWPC is deeply involved in protecting the future of the trans basin diversion (currently known as the Potter Valley Project) that provides water to hundreds of thousands of people from Mendocino County through Marin County—supporting agriculture, wildlife, and many local communities.

IWPC members include the County of Mendocino, City of Ukiah, Redwood Valley County Water District, Potter Valley Irrigation District, and Mendocino County Russian River Flood Control and Water Conservation Improvement District.

At the February IWPC meeting, increasing the outreach and education regarding the future of the trans basin diversion was discussed. The **attached** letter was drafted to be used as outreach to legislative leaders such as members of Congress, Senators, and Assemblymembers.

Additionally, the **attached** handout titled Preserving Water Supply is Necessary for the Future of the Greater Ukiah Valley was shared to help guide outreach.

Discussion

The Board will receive an update from IWPC representatives on future water supply through the trans basin diversion, consider signing on to the joint letter to legislators, and consider the outreach handout.

Recommended Action:

- Move to approve the District signing on to the joint letter to legislators.

Attachments

1. Proposed joint letter to legislators.
2. Preserving Water Supply is Necessary for the Future of the Greater Ukiah Valley handout

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Prepared and submitted to the Board of Trustees by: *Elizabeth Salomone, General Manager*

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Dear xx,

We wanted to bring to your attention the urgent discussions underway regarding PG&E's plan to decommission the Potter Valley Project and how our organizations are working to ensure the interests of the Greater Ukiah Valley are represented in future infrastructure and water supply management plans. For nearly 120 years water has been diverted from the Eel River into the Russian River – this diversion has been an essential part of positioning the Greater Ukiah Valley to grow. It has allowed us to plant farms and raise crops, found businesses, build schools, and create communities – but the Potter Valley Project decommissioning puts that future in jeopardy.

We know that change is on the horizon, and a new plan is needed to preserve a sustainable water supply for the Greater Ukiah Valley. As such, we strongly support the proposal to develop a New Eel-Russian Facility, which will allow water diversions to continue to occur from the Eel River to the Russian River during wet months when flows are high enough to support salmon and steelhead trout. This facility will provide a sustainable approach to water management while supporting recovery efforts for habitat and fish populations. But recently PG&E indicated it does not intend to include the NERF in its plan. That would cause serious harm to the region and ignore their responsibility to craft a balanced plan that addresses environmental, social, and economic considerations.

The stakes are high for Ukiah's future – there is a broad coalition of stakeholders committed to the region's water security. Without an adequate and sustainable water supply, the future of the Greater Ukiah Valley will be driven by a scarcity reminiscent of the extreme drought in 2021. If diversions end, the water supply for 650,000 people would be threatened throughout Mendocino, Marin, and Sonoma Counties. Compounding years of water scarcity would impoverish our economy and degrade our quality of life. That's why the Greater Ukiah Valley needs to be a strong and vocal participant in shaping the future water supply plan. Our entire way of life – our community, the local economy, and the region's agricultural output – DEPENDS on our ability to continue to divert water from the Eel River.

We have provided input on PG&E's Initial Draft Plan and will continue to engage in the coming months as they develop the Final Draft Plan to surrender the Potter Valley Project. **We need your help in advocating to PG&E, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), and State agencies such as the State Water Board and Department of Fish and Wildlife that the New Eel-Russian Facility is an essential part of the decommissioning plan to protect the region's future economic and social health.**

We have enclosed a coalition letter sent to PG&E, and a copy of their Initial Draft Plan. It is important that the elected officials throughout the Greater Ukiah Valley advocate strongly for a future plan to preserve water supply and protect the environment in a just and equitable way. Before the Final Draft Plan is issued in June, we need to demonstrate momentum in support of the New Eel-Russian Facility as the best solution for PG&E to meet its responsibility to protect and preserve this community.

Ukiah's future depends on ensuring a resilient, responsible, and enduring water supply. Can we meet to discuss what is needed from the PG&E decommissioning process for Potter Valley, and how you can help shape our collective future?

Thank you for your consideration,

(joint letter)

Preserving Water Supply is Necessary for the Future of the Greater Ukiah Valley

PG&E's Decommissioning of the Potter Valley Project Requires a New Approach for Water Diversions

Recently PG&E stated they are not planning to include the New Eel-Russian Facility (NERF) in their Potter Valley decommissioning plan. However, it is essential that the NERF is included to provide the most efficient and sustainable solution to long term water supply management. PG&E and FERC have a responsibility to this region to ensure that the decommissioning process balances environmental, social, and economic considerations – the NERF is the best way to fulfill that responsibility.

- **To preserve this community, we must preserve a sustainable water supply:** For nearly 120 years water has been diverted from the Eel River into the Russian River – this diversion has been an essential part of positioning the Greater Ukiah Valley to grow. It has allowed us to plant farms and raise crops, found businesses, build schools, and create communities. **To preserve this community, we must preserve a sustainable water supply** – but the Potter Valley Project decommissioning puts that future in jeopardy.
- **A new plan is needed to adapt to the changing infrastructure:** The Potter Valley Project is being decommissioned by PG&E and change is happening – but **if diversions end, the water supply for 650,000 people would be threatened** throughout Mendocino, Marin, and Sonoma Counties. We need to take action ensure long term water supplies for the Russian River water basin.
- **The New Eel-Russian Facility would be built and operated consistent with modern environmental protections:** With the New Eel-Russian Facility, water diversions would occur during wet months when flows are high enough to support salmon and steelhead trout in the Eel, while still contributing water to the Russian River supply. This provides a more sustainable approach to water management and supports recovery efforts for habitat and fish populations.
- **The Greater Ukiah Valley must be part of the effort to design the New Eel-Russian Facility:** The New Eel-Russian Facility will require regional cooperation for management and governance. There will be a newly created joint powers authority to govern and finance the project. The **Greater Ukiah Valley must ensure its interests are reflected in the facility and water management plans** to protect our future economic and social health.
- **The stakes are high for Ukiah's future:** There is a broad coalition of diverse stakeholders committed to the region's future water security. Without an adequate and sustainable water supply, the future of the Greater Ukiah Valley will be driven by a scarcity reminiscent of the extreme drought in 2021. Compounding years of water scarcity would impoverish our **economy and degrade our quality of life. Ukiah's future depends on ensuring a resilient, responsible, and enduring water supply.**
- **We must engage or we will be left behind:** The Potter Valley decommissioning process has been analyzed for more than five years, and the **New Eel-Russian Facility proposal presents a future plan to preserve water supply and protect the environment in a just and equitable way.** As PG&E completes its draft plan over the coming months to surrender the Potter Valley Project, the entire Greater Ukiah Valley needs to be a strong and vocal participant. **Our entire way of life – our community, the local economy, and the region's agricultural output – DEPENDS on our ability to continue to divert water from the Eel River.**