



**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**  
**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE  
Southwest Region  
777 Sonoma Ave., Room 325  
Santa Rosa, California 95404-4731

November, 15, 2010

In response, refer to:  
SWR/F/SWR3:RW

John Sweigard  
General Manager  
Merced Irrigation District  
P.O. Box 2288  
Merced, California 95344-0288

Steve Nevares  
PG&E, M.C. N11D  
P.O. Box 770000  
San Francisco, California 95117

Dear Mr. Sweigard and Mr. Nevares:

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) conducted two separate site inspections and evaluations of the in-river structures composing the Merced River and Merced Falls water and power delivery system. These site inspections occurred on February 2, 2010, and November 3, 2010. In addition to NOAA personnel, other participants in these site evaluations included personnel from California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Winzler and Kelly, Ecosystems Sciences, and GeoEngineers.

Based on our inspections and in consideration of input from the other participants, NOAA Fisheries-Engineering Branch believes that fish passage at Crocker-Huffman Dam and Merced Falls Dam should be re-established as a near-term, interim measure toward habitat restoration and recovery of Merced River's anadromous fish populations. Such actions are consistent with NMFS' long-term recovery goals in the Merced River watershed. In addition, re-establishment of fish passage has recently been identified as a conservation measure needed to maintain compliance with State Fish & Game code.

In the case of the Merced Falls and Crocker-Huffman fish ladders, we request hydraulic start-up testing beginning in January or February, 2011. Continued operations will depend on the outcome of these operational tests, and be developed in accordance with CDFG and NOAA Fisheries management objectives for Merced River anadromous fish resources. In addition, we recommend hydraulic evaluation and testing of the now-defunct "spawning channel" as an alternate means of fish passage at the Crocker-Huffman site. Adaptive



management should be employed toward the incremental design, construction, and operation of safe, timely, and effective fish passage and protection systems, as well as the enhancement of riverine habitats for native anadromous fish species. These actions should be coordinated to involve technical specialists from NMFS-Engineering and other interested resource agencies and stakeholders. We are very interested in assisting the District and PG&E in this important stewardship action on the Merced River.

Enclosed to this letter is a NOAA Technical Memorandum which describes the nature of the site inspections and our evaluations which led to the above recommendations. Please respond to this letter within 30 days of receipt to begin a dialogue about taking steps to restore fish passage in the Merced River. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at 707-575-6063.

Sincerely,



Richard L. Wantuck  
Regional Supervisor  
Hydropower and Fisheries Bioengineering Programs

Enclosure

cc: Steve Edmondson, NMFS  
Bill Foster, NMFS  
John Wooster, NMFS  
Maria Rea, NMFS  
Monica Gutierrez, NMFS  
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Jeff Single, CDFG  
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