

**Before the
State Water Resources Control Board**

**In the matter of Revocation of
Water Right Permits 16209, 16210, 16211 & 16212**

Policy Statement of Theresa Simsiman

My name is Theresa Simsiman. I am a Sacramento County resident, the current Events Coordinator for Gold Country Paddlers and Private Boater signatory to the Upper American River Project and Chili Bar Project Settlement Agreement. I am here today to represent the whitewater recreational interest as they pertain to the proposed revocation of water right permits for the United States Bureau of Reclamation.

The Emergence of Whitewater Recreation

In 1970 when the State Water Board conditionally approved water right permits for Auburn Dam, whitewater recreation in the area was only enjoyed by a privileged few. Fast-forward 38 years & of course times have changed. Interest in whitewater recreation has taken off with a deep devotion by the participants themselves. In fact, a recent study published in the Winter 2008 edition of the Journal of Leisure Research sites that sprint & whitewater paddlers take their sport more seriously than most other leisure sports:

“...in a 72-point questionnaire that asked the respondents to rate their perseverance, acquisition of knowledge and skills, benefits, and progress. Paddlers tended to score higher on experience (12 years), monetary investments (\$7,643/year) and time devoted to their sport per week (seven hours).”¹

Given this kind of devotion it is no wonder that in recent years California State Parks has monitored over 40 private outfitters who are licensed to offer whitewater trips in Auburn State Recreation Area.² And that a number of private whitewater paddling clubs now proliferate the state. Paddling clubs like Gold Country Paddlers (GCP), Loma Prieta Paddlers (LLP) & California Floaters Society (CFS) are frequent visitors to the whitewater runs found on the North Fork & Middle Fork American Rivers.

The Whitewater Recreational Stakeholder

Complementing the emergence of whitewater recreation in the Auburn State Recreation Area, commercial and private boaters began immersing themselves in the public trust of the area's river resources. This resulted in recognition of the whitewater recreational stakeholder in terms of management & planning.

¹ Paddler March/April 2008 “Paddlers Really are Special – New study quantifies boaters devotion to their sport”, pg 18.

² Auburn State Recreation Area – California State Parks, 9th Edition May 2006, pg 3.

Among the entities that have recently addressed the value of whitewater recreation within the ASRA are California State Parks, Placer County Water Agency and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

In May of 2006 California State Parks put the call out for public involvement in the Auburn SRA General Plan/Resource Management Plan. An identified preliminary key issue on the table for discussion was a Whitewater Recreation and Management Program:

“Whitewater rafting and kayaking are popular activities on both the North and Middle Forks of the American River. Maintaining high quality recreation experiences, providing adequate access and ensuring protection of resources as the popularity of these activities grows will be issues addressed in this plan.”³

Concurrently, in May and April of 2006 Placer County Water Agency conducted several introductory stakeholder meetings in preparation to submit their notice of intent to file an Application for New License for the Middle Fork American River Project, FERC Project No. 2079. In subsequent years, an invitation to participate in a Whitewater Boating Focus Discussion Group was issued in April of 2008. The purpose of which was to identify specific whitewater runs & characterize runs by such things as they're access points, adequacy of support facilities, length, flow and difficulty. At present the PCWA continues to engage whitewater recreation stakeholders with a recent boater invitation to participate in flows studies.

Finally, Reclamation itself stepped forward to address whitewater interests in September of 2007 when, despite their intent not to approve construction of significant permanent recreation facilities within a potential Auburn Reservoir, they closed the diversion tunnel at the site of the PCWA's new pump station, re-watered the North Fork American River from the Confluence to Oregon Bar River Access and included man made whitewater rapids linking seven small pools to convey boaters through the area. It is now a destination whitewater “play” feature drawing a number of advanced & beginner boaters alike.

Conclusion

As demonstrated, public process & procedure has ensured that public interest in the value of whitewater recreation has not been taken for granted. It is in this spirit that I support the State Water Board's revocation of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation water permits No's 16209, 16210, 16211 & 16212. These original permits do not consider the whitewater recreational uses in the canyon and can be revoked without prejudice. Thus, if and when permits are needed again, whitewater recreational stakeholders would be available to contribute to the State Water Board's deliberations.

³ Auburn State Recreation Area News: Planning For The Future – Update about the Auburn State Recreation Area, May 2006