



News Release

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Conservation, fish and recreation groups applaud draft *Mokelumne River Wild and Scenic Study Report*

Local, statewide and national conservation, fish and recreation organizations are applauding the release of the State Natural Resources Agency's draft *Mokelumne River Wild and Scenic Study Report*, which recommends adding 37 miles of the Mokelumne River to the California Wild and Scenic River System. The report was mandated by the 2015 passage of Assembly Bill 142 (Bigelow, R-O'Neals).

AB 142 was supported by local governments, water agencies, businesses and business groups, tribes and outdoor-oriented nonprofit organizations. It required the Natural Resources Agency to conduct a study to determine the suitability of sections of the upper Mokelumne River and North Fork Mokelumne for inclusion in the state system. The study segments included in the bill start below Salt Springs Dam and end at Pardee Reservoir's flood surcharge pool downstream of Highway 49 near Jackson, with gaps around PG&E facilities on the river.

The Resources Agency released the draft report for public comment on January 26. The study was completed by an expert consulting firm, GEI Consultants, and informed by an updated wild and scenic river-related water rights and diversion report by the California Research Bureau, a branch of the California State Library.

The draft Mokelumne study is now available for public review and comment. Comments are due to the California Natural Resources Agency by February 28. The agency will hold a public meeting to discuss the study and hear public comments on Thursday, February 15, at the Mokelumne Hill Town Hall, 8283 Main St, Mokelumne Hill, beginning at 6 p.m.

"As someone who has spent a great deal of time in the Mokelumne River canyon and on the river, I'm not surprised the state found the river to have 'extraordinary scenic values,'" said Foothill Conservancy President Katherine Evatt. "It's an incredibly beautiful place that brings joy, peace and inspiration to local residents and visitors, alike."

"We're glad to see that the study recommends adding all 37 miles of the Mokelumne listed in AB 142 to the California Wild and Scenic River system," said Friends of the River's Wild Rivers Consultant Steve Evans. "The study recognizes the Mokelumne's extraordinary scenic and recreational resources and finds that designating the river is fully consistent with the intent of the California Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Water agencies have questioned that in the past and demanded that the state do a study. Now we have the draft study, and it clearly demonstrates that the Mokelumne is worth protecting for generations to come."

The study's findings and conclusions include the following:

- The major effect of Mokelumne wild and scenic designation would be to ban onstream dams and reservoirs in the effected reaches of the river, as well as the diversion of water for use outside Amador and Calaveras counties.
- After designation, current uses of the Mokelumne River would continue. Wild and Scenic designation will not affect existing water rights, hydropower generation, hunting and fishing, land use, grazing, and agriculture. It will have limited potential effects on timber management or

logging on private lands and no effect on public land timber management. The study notes that wild and scenic designation does not give the state additional condemnation power and that no land along a state-designated has ever been subject to eminent domain.

- Local water agencies could develop “many types of water projects” upstream of the designated reaches “without adversely affecting the free-flowing condition, natural character, and extraordinary scenic and recreational values of designated segments.” The study also makes clear that CAWSR designation “does not seem to have adversely affected [water] diversion applications on wild and scenic rivers,” based on the 2017 findings of the California Research Bureau, and concludes that “Other environmental regulations such as CEQA would have more impact on a proposed project than the California Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (CRB 2018).”

The study lauded the diverse recreational opportunities along and near the Mokelumne, which include family camping, rock climbing, water play, fishing, swimming, gold panning, wildflower viewing and family outings in addition to whitewater boating. It states, “This array of both relaxing and challenging recreational opportunities and values is unique among western Sierra Nevada rivers and already designated State Wild and Scenic Rivers.”

Theresa Simsiman, California Stewardship Director of American Whitewater, noted her national organization’s support for the study’s recreational values analysis. “Paddlers are pleased to see the study acknowledge what we’ve known for decades. The Mokelumne River is a unique whitewater resource that boaters of all skill levels can enjoy.”

The recreation, fish and conservation groups do have some concerns about the draft Mokelumne study. They believe it should recognize the extraordinary wildlife value of the Mokelumne, which is home to numerous special status species, potential restoration spawning habitat for fall-run Chinook salmon, and a state-defined natural landscape block for wildlife. In addition, they believe the study’s inclusion of “special provisions” in its recommendations is not warranted and inconsistent with the California Research Bureau findings regarding the minimal effect of state wild and scenic designation on future water projects, diversions and water rights.

“We’d like to encourage everyone who cares about the Mokelumne to come to the public hearing in Mokelumne Hill,” Evans said. “You can learn more about the state study and speak up for protecting this very special river.”

For copies of the state study and appendices, see <http://resources.ca.gov/programs-projects/wildandscenic/>.

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