

AWA DIRECTORS SUPPORT WATER SUPPLY PROTECTIONS IN MOKELUMNE WILD & SCENIC RIVER STUDY

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PHOTO ATTACHED: The Mokelumne River.



(*Sutter Creek*) AWA Directors on Thursday approved a resolution in support of water supply protections included in a recently released “Mokelumne River Wild and Scenic River Report.”

The California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) issued the report on April 18 after two years of study required by Assembly Bill 142, to investigate and develop a recommendation concerning whether portions of the Mokelumne River should be designated “Wild and Scenic.”

The CNRA study concluded that the studied segments of the Mokelumne River are eligible and suitable for “California Wild & Scenic” designation and includes special provisions for protection of the water supply critical to Amador, Calaveras and Alpine Counties. The study looked at the section of the river from Salt Springs to Pardee Reservoir, excepting areas with existing PG&E facilities.

AWA Directors and staff had expressed concern about the potential for negative effects on future water supply included in earlier “Wild & Scenic” proposals for the Mokelumne River. All five Amador County cities are 100 percent reliant on the Mokelumne River for their community water, currently using less than two percent of the river’s average water flows.

In 2014, SB1199 Mokelumne River Wild and Scenic legislation very nearly passed through the state legislature, without input from local water districts on their long-term water needs or potential impacts from climate change. Water districts on the river pressed for a more comprehensive study, resulting in AB 142 and the CNRA study.

As part of the 2018 CNRA study process, AWA representatives met with representatives from the other local water agencies, East Bay MUD, Friends of the River, Foothill Conservancy, and CNRA, which resulted in special provision language that all representatives could support.

The provisions address the Water Agency's concerns including:

- Protection and full-utilization of existing water rights;
- A path to achieve new water supplies from the Mokelumne River in the future;
- Access to state funding for water supply studies and improvements;
- Better definition of what would constitute an "Adverse effect on free-flowing condition;"
- Protection for Roaring Camp Mining Company operations and facilities, and;
- Prohibition on state government entities requesting designation under the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

"Wild & Scenic designation with these special provisions will allow us to meet Amador County water needs in the future," said AWA Board President Art Toy.

"At the same time, Wild & Scenic designation will prevent potential "water grabs" by deep-pocket entities from outside Amador, Calaveras or Alpine Counties," said Toy.

AWA General Manager Gene Mancebo is hopeful that a bill including the special provisions can move through the legislative process within the next year.

"We're optimistic that all parties involved in crafting the study recommendations will support a bill that adheres to the language of the special provisions," Mancebo said.

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