**SECTION 204c REPORT FOR THE NORTH AND MIDDLE FORK OF THE AMERICAN RIVER WITHDRAWAL**

**EL DORADO AND PLACER COUNTIES, CALIFORNIA**

**INTRODUCTION:** The Assistant Secretary – Land and Minerals Management withdrew 6,737.42 acres of public lands from location and entry under the United States mining laws, but not from leasing under the mineral or geothermal leasing laws, for a 20‑year term. In compliance with Section 204(c)(2) of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, 43 U.S.C. 1714 (FLPMA), this report has been prepared to provide information regarding the withdrawal of public lands. This report summarizes the withdrawal and addresses the planning and other notice requirements applicable to withdrawals of public lands over 5,000 acres.

***ITEM 1 A clear explanation of the proposed use of the land which led to the withdrawal.***

In September 1965, Congress authorized construction of Auburn Dam and Reservoir. The Bureau of Reclamation started construction in 1967 and included a bypass tunnel, a cofferdam, and excavations for the dam foundation. However construction was suspended in 1977 to conduct a seismic safety study that culminated in a change of design for the Dam. Congress has not yet reauthorized the new design. The withdrawal provides protection of lands associated with the Auburn Dam and Reservoir Site from location and entry under the United States mining laws while the dam and reservoir design changes are being considered by Congress.

In September 1990 the BLM completed the American River National Recreation Area Feasibility Study. The North and Middle Fork of the American River were within the study area. The study was to determine the feasibility and desirability of designating a National Recreation Area (NRA) within the American River watershed in association with a flood control or multipurpose dam located at the site of the Auburn Dam. The study recommends that once Congress resolves the issue of the dam, then Federal, State, and local agencies and groups should work to reach a decision on the recreational use in the area. The purpose of this withdrawal is to protect the area from location and entry under the United States mining laws while providing time to further study the American River NRA.

The North and Middle Fork of the American River are within the designated Auburn State Recreation Area. These segments of river have an abundance of outstanding natural and cultural features and offer a wide variety of recreational opportunities. California Department of Parks and Recreation manages lands acquired by the Bureau of Reclamation under an interim agreement initiated in 1977 and continued in 1980 by Memorandum of Understanding.

***ITEM 2 An inventory and evaluation of the current natural resources uses and how they will be affected by the withdrawal.***

Much of the subject area has been inventoried for cultural resources. The largest single effort was made by archaeologists during the 1960s and 1970s for the Auburn Dam Project. The inventory effort is documented in a series of reports on file at the North Central Information -Center and at California State University Sacramento and the Bureau of Reclamation’s Mid-Pacific Region Office.

Energy and Minerals

A mineral report was prepared on May 28, 2014. The subject lands have low to no potential for the development of mineral resources. No deposits of mineral materials suitable for commercial or private use are known to occur on the subject lands.

Recreation Resources

The North and Middle Fork of the American River are within the designated Auburn State Recreation Area. These segments of river have an abundance of outstanding natural and cultural features and offer a wide variety of recreational opportunities. The Middle and North Fork of the American River are very popular with recreationists. Recreation opportunities include hiking, boating, swimming, white water rafting, and picnicking.

The California Department of Parks and Recreation manages some of the BLM lands and lands acquired by the Bureau of Reclamation under an interim agreement initiated in 1977 and continued in 1980 by Memorandum of Understanding.

Public Health and Safety

The following critical elements have been considered and have been determined to be unaffected by the withdrawal: air quality, areas of critical environmental concern, prime/unique farmlands, floodplains, wild and scenic rivers, wilderness, invasive, nonnative weeds, and environmental justice.

Water Quality

The Middle and North Fork of the American River are major waterways in the west central Sierra Nevada flowing west from the crest to where they join the South Fork in Folsom Lake. The lower American River then travels down to the lower Sacramento Valley and into the Sacramento River which flows into San Francisco Bay. The importance of water quality is evident in the American River watershed. Placer and El Dorado County and the Sacramento metropolitan area rely on the American River water for agricultural and municipal purposes.

Special Status Species Habitat

The impacts of the withdrawal would be beneficial. The withdrawal would allow soils and vegetation to remain in their present productive state where no mining claims exist.

***ITEM 3 An identification of present users of the land involved, and how they will be affected by the proposed use.***

Energy and Minerals

The subject lands have a moderate to high potential for the occurrence of gold and low to moderate potential for the occurrence of chromite and industrial grade limestone, but they have low to no mineral development potential. With the exception of recreational, hobby scale prospecting activities, there is no significant interest in these mineral resources. The withdrawal will not substantially interfere with mineral development opportunities.

Recreation Resources

The Middle and North Fork of the American River are major waterways in the west central Sierra Nevada flowing west from the crest to where they join the South Fork in Folsom Lake. The Middle and North Fork of the American River are very popular with recreationists. The American River has and will continue to be a highly used recreation area for hiking, picnicking, boating, swimming and white water rafting.

Water Quality

The Middle and North Fork of the American River are major waterways in the west central Sierra Nevada flowing west from the crest to where they join the South Fork in Folsom Lake. The lower American River then travels down to the lower Sacramento Valley and into the Sacramento River which flows into San Francisco Bay. The importance of water quality is evident in the American River watershed. Placer and El Dorado County and the Sacramento metropolitan area rely on the American River water for agricultural and municipal purposes.

## Vegetation (including special status plant species)

The impacts of the withdrawal would be beneficial. The withdrawal would allow soils and vegetation to remain in their present productive state where no mining claims exist. The withdrawal would not impact current mining claims which would continue under a prior existing right. However, if the claims were abandoned or forfeited, the claims could not be relocated. There are no known populations of special status plants on the subject lands so the special status plants would be unaffected by the withdrawal. Under the no action alternative, vegetation could be impacted if new claims were filed.

Special Status Species Habitat

The subject lands encompass approximately 3 river miles along the Middle and North Fork of the American River and several miles of tributaries and riparian greenbelts. The riparian zones along the American River and its tributaries support significant botanical and wildlife diversity.

***ITEM 4 An analysis of the manner in which existing and potential resource uses are incompatible with or in conflict with the proposed use, together with the existing uses, including an economic analysis of such continuation or termination.***

The main impacts of the withdrawal would be beneficial by providing for surface protection from mineral exploration activities over which the BLM has little discretion to prevent. Without the withdrawal earth disturbing mineral exploration could occur on the public lands. This could result in recreational and habitat loss and consequent adverse impacts to species. There are populations of foothill yellow-legged frog and California spotted owl, both BLM sensitive species, within the project area. These species would be expected to benefit from the lands being withdrawn from mineral entry.

The withdrawal would protect high quality, diverse wildlife habitat in a greenbelt corridor of public domain lands and along the Middle and North forks of the American River. Habitat and species would continue to be impacted at existing levels in areas with current mining claims.

***ITEM 5 An analysis of the manner in which such lands will be*** **used in relation to the specific requirements for the proposed use.**

There is concern that lands in this area not withdrawn from mineral entry may be open to mining claims that would impede BLM’s surface management for recreation, riparian areas, wildlife habitat, and scenic quality. The withdrawal also provides protection of lands associated with the congressionally designated Auburn Dam Reclamation Project area while a decision on future development of the site is pending.

On February 21, 2012, an agreement was signed between the Department of the Interior and California State Parks to maintain recreational facilities at this site for the next 25 years. Congressman Tom McClintock is directly involved in supporting recreational uses for this project area. Recreational user groups for this area include trail runners, hikers, swimmers, boaters, fishermen, campers, cyclists, horseback riders and off-highway motorcycle riders.

***ITEM 6* A statement as to whether any suitable sites are available (including costs estimates) for the proposed use or for uses such as the withdrawal would displace.**

The withdrawal and other alternatives were presented and discussed during the Environmental Assessment (EA) public process. No suitable alternative sites were identified.

***ITEM 7 A statement of the consultation that has been or will be had with other Federal departments and agencies, with regional State and local government bodies, and with other appropriate individuals and groups.***

The Bureau of Reclamation and California State Parks concur and support the withdrawal. Congressman Tom McClintock is directly involved in supporting recreational uses for this project area.

***ITEM 8 A statement indicating the effect of the proposed uses, if any on State and local government interests and the regional economies.***

On February 21, 2012, an agreement was signed between the Department of the Interior and California State Parks to maintain recreational facilities at this site for the next 25 years. Recreational user groups for this area include trail runners, hikers, swimmers, boaters, fishermen, campers, cyclists, horseback riders and off-highway motorcycle riders.

***ITEM 9 A statement of the expected length of time needed for the withdrawal.***

The duration of the withdrawal is 20 years.

***ITEM 10 The time and place of hearing and of other public involvement concerning the withdrawal.***

On September 4, 2012, a Notice of Proposed Withdrawal was published in the *Federal Register*. This notice was requested to provide time for an analysis of the lands and to provide time for public input. A public meeting was held on May 20, 2014, and a 90-day comment period was provided to the public for input. The BLM did not receive any objections to the withdrawal. BLM did receive a letter of support from the Board of Directors of Protect American River Canyons. Congressman Tom McClintock is directly involved in supporting recreational uses for this project area.

***ITEM 11 The place where the records on the withdrawal can be examined by interested parties.***

The case file CACA-52573 is available for review by the public at the BLM California Mother Lode Field Office, 5152 Hillsdale Circle, El Dorado Hills, California 95762.

***ITEM 12 Mineral Report***

A mineral report was prepared on May 28, 2014. The subject lands have low to no potential for the development of mineral resources. The subject lands have a moderate to high potential for the occurrence of gold and low to moderate potential for the occurrence of chromite and industrial grade limestone, but they have low to no mineral development potential. With the exception of recreational, hobby scale prospecting activities, there is no significant interest in these mineral resources. The withdrawal will not substantially interfere with mineral development opportunities.