

Lee Vining, FERC Project No. 1388

TERRESTRIAL AND BOTANICAL TWG 3 MEETING NOTES

APRIL 7, 2021; 10 AM - 12 PM PDT

**These meeting notes are documentation of general discussions from the meeting held on the above-noted date. These notes are not a verbatim account of proceedings, are not meeting minutes, and do not represent any final decisions or official documentation for the project or participating agencies.*

1. Attendees

Relicensing Team Members

Allison Rudalevige, Psomas
Brad Blood, Psomas
Carissa Shoemaker, ERM
David Hughes, Psomas
Edith Read, ERA
Finlay Anderson, Kleinschmidt
Matthew Woodhall, SCE
Shannon Luoma, Kleinschmidt
Steve Norton, Psomas

Agencies and Interested Stakeholders

Alyssa Marquez, CDFW
Blake Englehardt, USFS
Chad Mellison, USFWS
James "Jim" Erdman, CDFW
Nathan Sill, USFS

2. Compiled Action Items

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- Psomas, USFWS, USFS, and CDFW have a separate call to discuss the best approach for approaching Endangered Species Act consultation for Yosemite toad, including appropriate survey methods, study area, existing models, and Biological Assessment needs.
 - The Relicensing Team will talk internally about our capability to calculate NDVI and USFS (Nathan Sill) will talk to the USFS remote sensing lab to see if it would be possible on their side.

3. Welcome, Introductions, Review of Notes and Other TWGs' Potential Studies

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- Matthew Woodhall provided a Safety moment
 - Introductions of team and all participants via the chat window
 - Review of notes/comments from February
 - The Relicensing Team listed the potential studies / study requests that are being discussed in the other resource TWGs. SCE intends to make sure that on an ongoing basis, the subject matter experts for each TWG are communicating with each other so that TWGs can ensure that interdisciplinary objectives are covered.
 - Comment: Blake Englehardt, USFS
 - Thank you for sharing what is being discussed in other working groups. For these Aquatics studies, have there been discussions about study boundaries/areas? For the first two (Aquatic Habitat Assessment and Sediment

Characterization, and Operations Model / Peaking Flow Study), are they looking at anything downstream of Poole Powerhouse, or is everything above stream? Thomas Torres (USFS) shared some of the notes about this with me.

- Response: Relicensing Team - Not sure if we have resolved that yet. Project-affected reaches are areas above the powerhouse and within FERC boundary, we are still working in the Aquatics TWG to determine the study areas, clarify how the project operates, and the perception of cycling and intermittent flows. We are providing additional data and clarification from operations that could impact the scope of downstream studies. We would for now like to keep studies constrained to the FERC boundary.
- Comment: USFS
 - Which of the Aquatics studies did you say don't have a nexus?
 - Response: Relicensing Team - Peaking flow study is point of interest for the Mono Lake Committee and other stakeholders. No changes in project operations would occur, so we don't see the nexus. We are continuing to discuss this though. Other questionable nexus is the requested study to look at the impact of plant cycling on lower Lee Vining Creek. We need more data and an informed discussion.
- Comment: USFS
 - Will a study involving water quality parameters move forward?
 - Response: Relicensing Team – There are data gaps that need to be filled in, the key question for water quality is what the water boards will need for the 401 certifications. But we can't have so many restrictions that will prevent the project from existing as a hydro project.

4. Discussion of Resource Management Objectives / Potential Study Requests

- Relicensing team reviewed each potential study request received to date, and the elements considered in study requests but not included. Specific studies requested: **Yosemite Toad, Riparian Birds, Invasive Plants and unit on Didymo, Special Status Plants, and Riparian community.**
- Currently proposing: **Wildlife, Botanical, and Riparian Studies**
- Wildlife study objectives, rationale, and study area overview
 - Comment: CDFW
 - The Yosemite toad study shared previously looks to be in the FERC boundary at known locations. But the toads can travel pretty far. There could be a need to survey outside of the FERC boundary because of their movements.
 - Comment: CDFW – The nexus for studying toads outside of the FERC boundary may be impacts from recreation. What are the impacts of recreation on toad populations, collapsing their burrows, walking in their breeding areas, etc.
 - Response: Relicensing Team - There will need to be consultation with USFWS in the NEPA process to figure out RTE species, what ultimately will be necessary to check the consultation box?

- Response: USFWS – Section 7 consultation doesn’t have to do with NEPA, it is a separate process. It does require a Biological Assessment (BA), whether its concurrence or a consultation. Looking at direct and indirect impacts of the project, you may need to think bigger than what you’re used to. We do have some good modeling exercises that have been done looking at toad traveling distances away from breeding sites. We can help narrow the scope of direct and indirect impacts.
 - Response: Relicensing Team – The models would help us set some boundaries as far as study area/nexus goes. SCE will be FERC informal designee for ESA consultation after we file the PAD. We develop the record now so when FERC reaches out to the USFWS the record will be there.
 - Comment: USFWS – NEPA looks at everything, Section 7 is specific to listed species. The level of detail needed in Section 7 for effects is way more than what you would do in a NEPA analysis.
 - Comment: CDFW – In our proposed study for toads, there was a buffer suggested (100 ft vertical elevation) to include the upland habitat for burrows and overwintering. This could cover the areas outside of the FERC boundary that we are concerned about.
 - Comment: Relicensing Team – We would like to get together on another call and discuss the toad methods for BA scoping, study area, existing models, and BA scoping. This call should include at least Psomas, USFWS, USFS, and CDFW.
 - Botanical study objectives, rationale, and study area overview
 - Comment: CDFW
 - This is a FERC process question, if we did the botanical study, found that there are invasive plants, and the O&M vehicles are causing the spread, would the USFS address this in 4(e) conditions? Is that how it would proceed?
 - Response: Relicensing Team – As we go further into developing the studies and make PM&Es, we would identify the appropriate management plan for this to be addressed. The USFS may implement those as a 4(e) condition. However, that particular condition (cleaning O&M vehicles for seeds) is already a practice that SCE does when moving from site to site.
 - Comment: CDFW – So the goal would be to figure out where the invasives are, but we already have methods for dealing with the invasives.
 - Riparian community assessment objectives, rationale, and study area overview
 - The Relicensing Team added a description of aerial imagery flight lines that will occur this year as part of the ongoing studies for the current license.
 - Comment: USFS
 - Is the imagery taken specifically for riparian vegetation or the project overall?
 - Response: Relicensing Team – It was originally specific to riparian vegetation, as part of the program that the USFS set up for SCE to follow; however, there are additional aspects looked at like stream meanders/sinuosity.
 - Comment: USFS

- Is the dataset normalized difference vegetation index (NDVI) data or what is being collected?
 - NDVI = “A graphical indicator that can be used to analyze remote sensing measurements, often from a space platform, assessing whether or not the target being observed contains live green vegetation.” Healthy vegetation absorbs most of the visible light that hits it, and reflects a large portion of the near-infrared light. Unhealthy or sparse vegetation reflects more visible light and less near-infrared light.
- Response: Relicensing Team - With the Infrared band we would look at widths of the riparian vegetation and wet meadows, comparing it back to 2016 and 2011. The images are high-resolution but would not be able to identify individual species, it would compare overall conditions over time.
- Comment: Relicensing Team - How can we best use this data for project effects and make it useful for other purposes? As a reminder, when the current license was issued the FERC boundary went downstream further, some of the downstream photo areas are not in the project area anymore since the transmission line has been since taken out.
- Comment: USFS
 - If you’re comparing the data from current to 5-10 years past will you look at the current FERC boundary or the whole set of images all the way to Mono Lake?
 - Response: Relicensing Team – We would focus on the FERC boundary, not the whole way to Mono Lake, but can do it later if required. The scope of the analysis would be as appropriate to determine project effects. The study areas vary per individual studies and are still being discussed per study. Note that analysis will be the same because these images are part of a current study, which needs to be separated from the relicensing new proposed studies. But we can use this older data as a reference point.
 - Response: USFS – This makes sense to me, thank you for bringing it up as a resource to use for relicensing effort.
- Comment: CDFW
 - Looking back at NDVI, it seems like NDVIs should be calculated from the data we gather, would the consultants do that or would CDFW do that to effectively calculate vegetation between the years? And are all of the flights conducted within the same season/months?
 - Response: Relicensing Team – Flights occur during August each year. We have not been requested/required to analyze using NDVI.
 - Comment: USFS – We may want to have more discussion of NDVI, it would be extremely useful to have the calculation and comparison across the years. It’s not a resourcing program that the Inyo has a say in, but we do have a remote sensing lab that may be able to make the calculations for us. I will need to see if this is possible on our end. NDVI compares the vegetation’s “greenness” or health across years.
 - Response: Relicensing Team – Lets think about the project effects and what level of analysis is needed. We will talk internally about our capability to

calculate NDVI and USFS (Nathan) will talk to the remote sensing lab to see if it would be possible on their side.

5. Schedule & Next Steps

- Skipping a meeting in late April, next proposed meeting is proposed end of May.
- Reminder to get study plans and concerns to the relicensing team sooner than later so the fall season is less hectic for everyone.
- Additional action items are underlined above.

6. Upcoming TWG Meetings

Aquatics 4	May 24, 2021 9:30am
Terrestrial 4	May 26, 2021 10am
Cultural and Tribal 4	May 26, 2021 1:30pm
Recreation and Land Use 4	May 27, 2021 10am