

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PLACER COUNTY WATER AGENCY INVESTS IN RECREATION AND SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH MAJOR INFRASTRUCTURE UPGRADES

Campground modernization and dam upgrades will enhance visitor experience, improve environmental health, and optimize water and power management.

AUBURN, Calif. (January 17, 2025) — At its Thursday meeting, the Placer County Water Agency Board of Directors approved construction contracts for two major projects for 2025: Modernization of the French Meadows Campground and modification of two diversion dams on the North Fork and South Fork of Long Canyon Creek.



Aerial view of French Meadows Campground, with the picturesque French Meadows Reservoir in the background. Major upgrades are coming to enhance the visitor experience and environmental sustainability.

Both upgrades are required for the operation of the Middle Fork Project under PCWA's Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) license agreement. The campground rehabilitation will improve the recreational user experience, and the diversion dam modifications will benefit fish and wildlife habitat, reduce maintenance costs, and increase water diversion efficiency.

The board awarded BRCO Construction a nearly \$6.8 million contract to upgrade French Meadows, PCWA's most popular campground is a favorite among local residents, with more than half its visitors calling Placer County home. Due to construction, the campground –

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Campground sites at French Meadows will be lengthened to better accommodate modern trailers and the water system will be replaced, making for more enjoyable camping experience here.

which has more than 70 spaces – will be closed for the 2025 season.

“This will be a complete rehabilitation of the campground,” explained Ben Ransom, PCWA’s Environmental Services Manager.

“French Meadows was originally constructed in the mid-1960s. It will be totally upgraded with wider and longer parking spaces to accommodate more modern vehicles and camping trailers. The roads within the campground will be widened to accommodate larger trailers, too.

“Tent pads will be flattened, not sloped,” Ransom added. “We’re adding more bathrooms and faucets; they’ll all be ADA compliant. So will the new picnic tables and fire rings. We’re also adding a small amphitheater/seating area for public gatherings.”

The campground work will take place at the same time as the previously awarded French Meadows South Shore Water Supply project, which includes a new vertical well and distribution lines. The South Shore project serves the campground’s water needs as well as the nearby boat ramp and picnic area. By implementing the campground and water supply projects concurrently, impacts on French Meadows recreational use can be limited to one season.

“The existing water supply is a low-yield horizontal well; the pipes are old and constantly leaking,” Ransom said. “All the waterlines – more than 5,000 feet of pipes – will be replaced. We’re planning to get all the work done in one year, so the campground should be reopened in 2026.” These upgrades ensure the campground continues to serve the community while aligning with PCWA’s long term sustainability goals.

In addition, the board approved a \$12.7 million contract with Granite Construction Company for upgrades to North Fork and South Fork Long Canyon Diversion Dams. The two small concrete diversion dams and water intake structures are part of the Middle Fork Project, and crucial to making the most of PCWA’s water storage and power generating capabilities. These improvements will be funded through MFP funds, not by ratepayers.

Located on Long Canyon Creek, the dams combined can divert up to 300 cubic feet per second (cfs) of supplemental water flow directly into the Middle Fork Tunnel, which feeds the Middle Fork Powerhouse when it is operating, or goes into storage at Hell Hole Reservoir when it is not. PCWA’s largest reservoir, Hell Hole can hold about 207,000 acre-feet of water.

However, sediment build-up in the pools behind the dams hampered their efficiency. The dams also represented downstream passage barriers to the wild rainbow trout that are found in the creek.

“During a high-flow year, the diversion pools will completely fill up with sediments,” Ransom explained. “We have to manually remove it and that’s become increasingly costly. Plus, we’re running out of places in the forest to put that excavated sediment. It really belongs in the creeks themselves.”

The revamped dams and water intake structures will allow sediments to pass through, just as nature intends. New screens also will allow for fish passage downstream.

“These upgrades help our operations and maintenance,” Ransom said. “It also helps the fish. It helps the riparian environment including the alders and willows. It helps everything, a true win-win for our operations and the ecosystem.”

“With this project, we can more efficiently divert water at both facilities and reduce costly maintenance while also providing environmental benefits,” Ransom said.

The Long Canyon upgrades support PCWA’s ability to divert the full volume of its water rights, enhancing storage at French Meadows and Hell Hole reservoirs. This strengthens water supply reliability and hydropower generation, key components of PCWA’s mission to manage Placer County’s resources effectively.

The next regular meeting of the PCWA Board of Directors will be held on Thursday, February 6, 2025, 2:00 PM, at the PCWA Business Center, 144 Ferguson Road, in Auburn. PCWA board meetings are open to the public.

For information on PCWA board meetings, please contact the Clerk to the Board at (530) 823-4850 or (800) 464-0030.

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About PCWA

Placer County Water Agency (PCWA) is the primary water resource agency for Placer County, California, with a broad range of responsibilities including water resource planning and management, retail and wholesale supply of drinking water and irrigation water, and production of hydroelectric energy.