

NOTICE OF PREPARATION

To: State Clearinghouse, Responsible and Trustee Agencies, and Interested Parties and Organizations

From: Placer County, Department of Facility Services, Parks Division (CEQA Lead Agency)

Contact: Andy Fisher

Date: November 10, 2005

Subject: Notice of Preparation of an Environmental Impact Report for the Proposed North Fork American River Trail Project

PURPOSE OF THE NOTICE OF PREPARATION

Placer County, as the Lead Agency, will prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for the proposed North Fork American River Trail Project (proposed project). Once a decision is made to prepare an EIR, the lead agency must prepare a Notice of Preparation (NOP) in accordance with State CEQA Guidelines Section 15082. Placer County has prepared this NOP to inform all responsible and trustee agencies (agencies) that an EIR will be prepared and to solicit comments from public agencies and other interested parties on the scope and content of the information to be addressed in the EIR for this project. The NOP is designed to provide stakeholders with sufficient information describing the proposed project and its potential environmental effects to enable agencies and the public to make a meaningful response related to the scope and content of information to be included in the EIR.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

CEQA defines a “project” as any activity directly undertaken by a public agency that “may cause either a direct physical change in the environment, or a reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment” (Public Resources Code Section 21065). Public Resources Code Section 21151(a) specifies that a local agency must prepare an EIR on any project that it proposes to carry out or approve that may have a significant impact on the environment. It has been determined that the proposed North Fork American River Trail project may result in significant environmental impacts, and therefore, Placer County will prepare an EIR on the proposed project. A description of the proposed project is provided below.

PROJECT LOCATION

The proposed project is located on the southern slope of the North Fork of the American River canyon in Placer County, approximately 40 miles northeast of Sacramento. The beginning of the trail is located at the confluence of the North and Middle forks of the American River, approximately 3 miles northeast of the City of Auburn near Foresthill Road. The trail ends at Ponderosa Bridge, approximately 12.6 miles upstream and 5 miles west of the town of Foresthill (Exhibit 1). The trail would be primarily located on land owned by the Bureau of Reclamation in the Auburn State Recreation Area (ASRA), which is managed by California State Parks. The trail alignment is generally bounded by Interstate 80 to the north and Foresthill Road to the south.

PROJECT BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

The proposed 12.6-mile multi-use trail is based, in part, on the proposed North Fork American River Trail Plan (Trail Plan). The Trail Plan is a product of the Trail Advisory Group (TAG) that was organized for the purposes of this project. The TAG is comprised of local citizens and stakeholders, and was formed to help identify a trail alignment and assist in providing public input related to trail planning issues and areas of controversy. The TAG consists of 12 representatives from environmental organizations, United States Bureau of Reclamation, the California Department of Parks and Recreation, and trail user groups (i.e., equestrian, hiker, mountain biker). Members of the TAG may continue to provide input and assistance with the proposed project during the environmental review and construction phases. Volunteers from various interest groups may also help with trail maintenance in the future.

In 2004, Placer County completed a CEQA Initial Study and NEPA Environmental Assessment (IS/EA) to assess the proposed project's potential effects on the environment and the significance of those effects. The IS/EA concluded that there was no substantial evidence that any aspect of the proposed trail project, either individually or cumulatively, would result in a significant effect on the environment based on mitigation measures that were incorporated as part of the project that would avoid or reduce potential adverse environmental effects; as a result, a Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) was prepared for the project. The County approved the MND and filed a Notice of Determination (NOD) pursuant to CEQA on August 24, 2004, and Reclamation adopted a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) pursuant to NEPA on August 2, 2004.

During the public review phase of the IS/EA, members of the public provided comments expressing their views on potential environmental effects of the project. In response to issues raised by the public, the County has decided to prepare an EIR pursuant to CEQA for the proposed project and vacated its approval of the MND on May 10, 2005. This EIR is intended to address the issues raised by the public and to provide a more comprehensive environmental review of topics that the County had determined should have additional analysis beyond the information presented in the IS/EA.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Project objectives are an important component of the project description. Objectives represent the overarching goals and purpose of a project, and are typically used as a screening tool in evaluating project alternatives. Placer County has developed the following objectives for the proposed North Fork American River Trail project:

1. Provide access to the North Fork American River canyon within the Auburn State Recreation Area to a wide variety of users.
2. Route the trail to discourage informal connections to the lake/river.
3. Allow multiple non-motorized uses along the trail.
4. Reduce visibility of trail from river/lake.
5. Minimize environmental impacts of trail construction, including the avoidance of sensitive areas.
6. Promote safe grades and safe alignments.
7. Connect to staging termini (Foresthill Road and Ponderosa Way).
8. Provide connections to existing trails.
9. Ensure emergency access to trail.

10. Minimize conflicts with private property.
11. Design alignment to minimize conflicts with trail users.

PROJECT COMPONENTS

The proposed project located along the southern slope of the American River canyon would include the following components:

- ▶ a 12.6-mile multi-use trail accommodating hiking, biking and equestrian use (Exhibit 2);
- ▶ bridges and stream fords to accommodate stream crossings;
- ▶ two staging areas (Foresthill Road and Ponderosa Way);
- ▶ portable restroom;
- ▶ signage; and
- ▶ informational kiosks.

PROJECT ALTERNATIVES

The EIR will evaluate a range of alternatives in accordance with Section 15126.6 of the State CEQA Guidelines. The alternatives evaluation will consist of a qualitative and comparative analysis of a set of project alternatives, including the “No Project” Alternative. Alternatives analyzed in the EIR will be selected from among alternative trail alignments considered in the Trail Plan, identified through the public review process, and/or developed by the County.

SCOPING AND PUBLIC REVIEW

Public scoping is an initial, essential, and important component of the proposed project. Scoping will help to identify the final range of actions, alternatives, site design options, environmental impacts to be evaluated, methods of assessment, and mitigation measures that will be analyzed in the EIR. The scoping process will help to eliminate from detailed study those issues that are not critical to the decision at hand. It is also an effective way to bring together and resolve the concerns of interested federal, state, and local agencies; specific stakeholder groups; and the general public.

Before the release of this NOP, the County held a public scoping meeting on August 31, 2005 in Auburn, California to present the project and to solicit comments on the project and the environmental review process. The comments presented at the meeting were noted, will be considered, and will be included as part of the EIR.

In addition, the NOP will be circulated for a 30-day review period as specified by the CEQA Guidelines. The 30-day NOP review and comment period begins **November 10, 2005** and ends **December 10, 2005**. Written responses can be submitted anytime during the NOP review period. Please include the name of a contact person for your agency, if applicable. All written public and agency comments should be directed to:

Andy Fisher
Placer County Parks Division, Facility Services Department
11476 C Avenue
Auburn, California 95603
Phone: (530) 889-6819
Fax: (530) 889-6809
Email: AFisher@placer.ca.gov

Your views and comments on how the project may affect the environment are welcomed. Please contact Andy Fisher if you have any questions about the proposed North Fork American River Trail Project and/or the environmental review process.

AGENCY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

PLACER COUNTY

Placer County will serve as the lead agency for CEQA compliance and will coordinate extensively with CEQA responsible and trustee agencies. As lead agency under CEQA, Placer County will be principally responsible for conducting the environmental review process, including scoping, preparing appropriate environmental documentation, and obtaining required permits and other regulatory approvals. Following completion of the EIR, the Placer County Board of Supervisors will decide whether to certify and approve the EIR.

PROBABLE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT

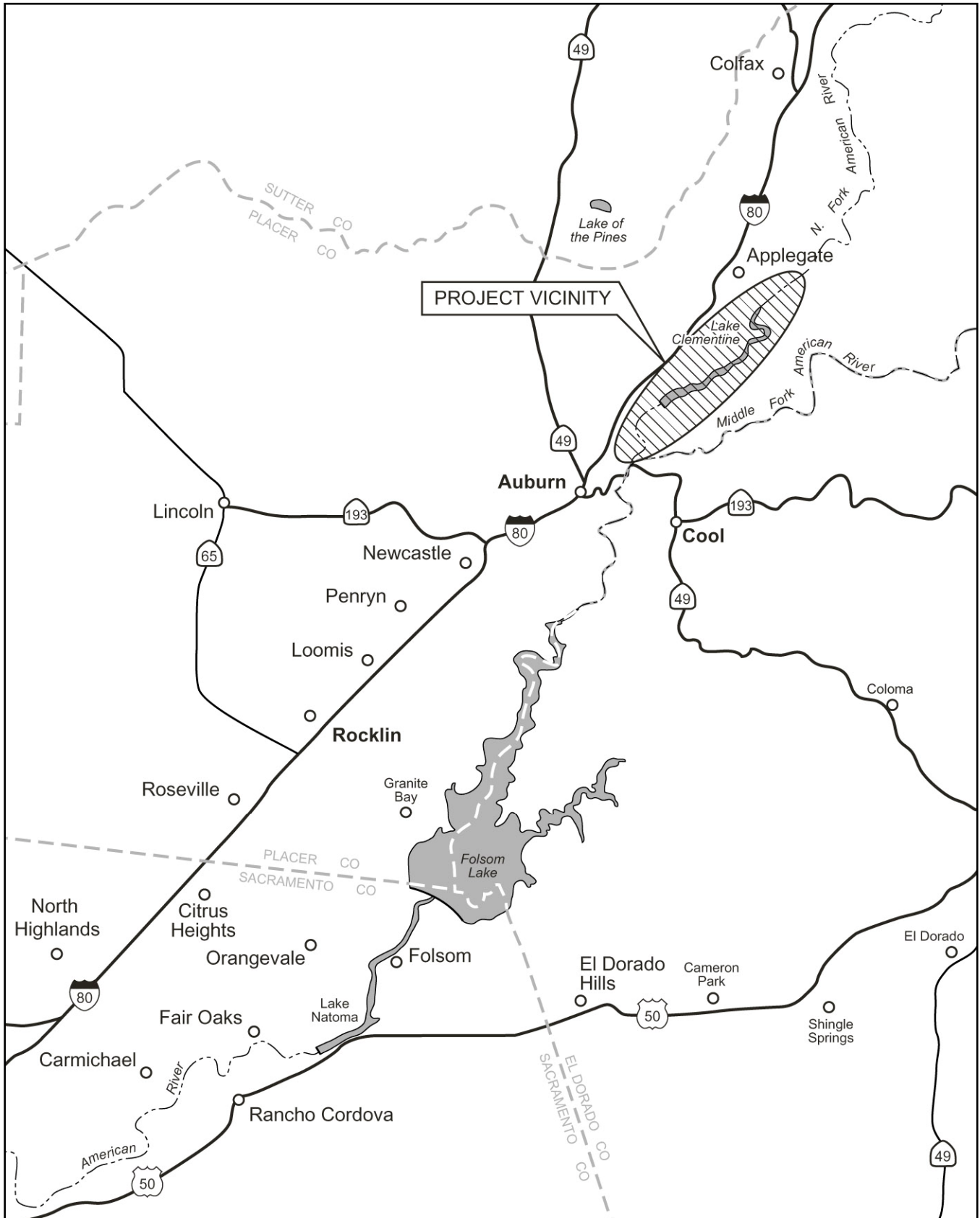
The EIR will analyze a broad range of environmental impacts association with the implementation of the proposed project. Based on the environmental analysis previously conducted in the IS/EA and public comments, Placer County has determined that the proposed project has the potential to result in environmental impacts on the following resources, which will be analyzed in further detail in the EIR:

- ▶ Land Use and Planning
- ▶ Geology and Soils
- ▶ Hydrology and Water Quality
- ▶ Air Quality
- ▶ Traffic and Transportation
- ▶ Biological Resources
- ▶ Noise
- ▶ Public Services
- ▶ Aesthetics and Visual Resources
- ▶ Cultural Resources
- ▶ Recreation

Project-related impacts to the following resources were found to be absent, or at less-than-significant levels, and therefore, will not be carried forward for further analysis in the EIR:

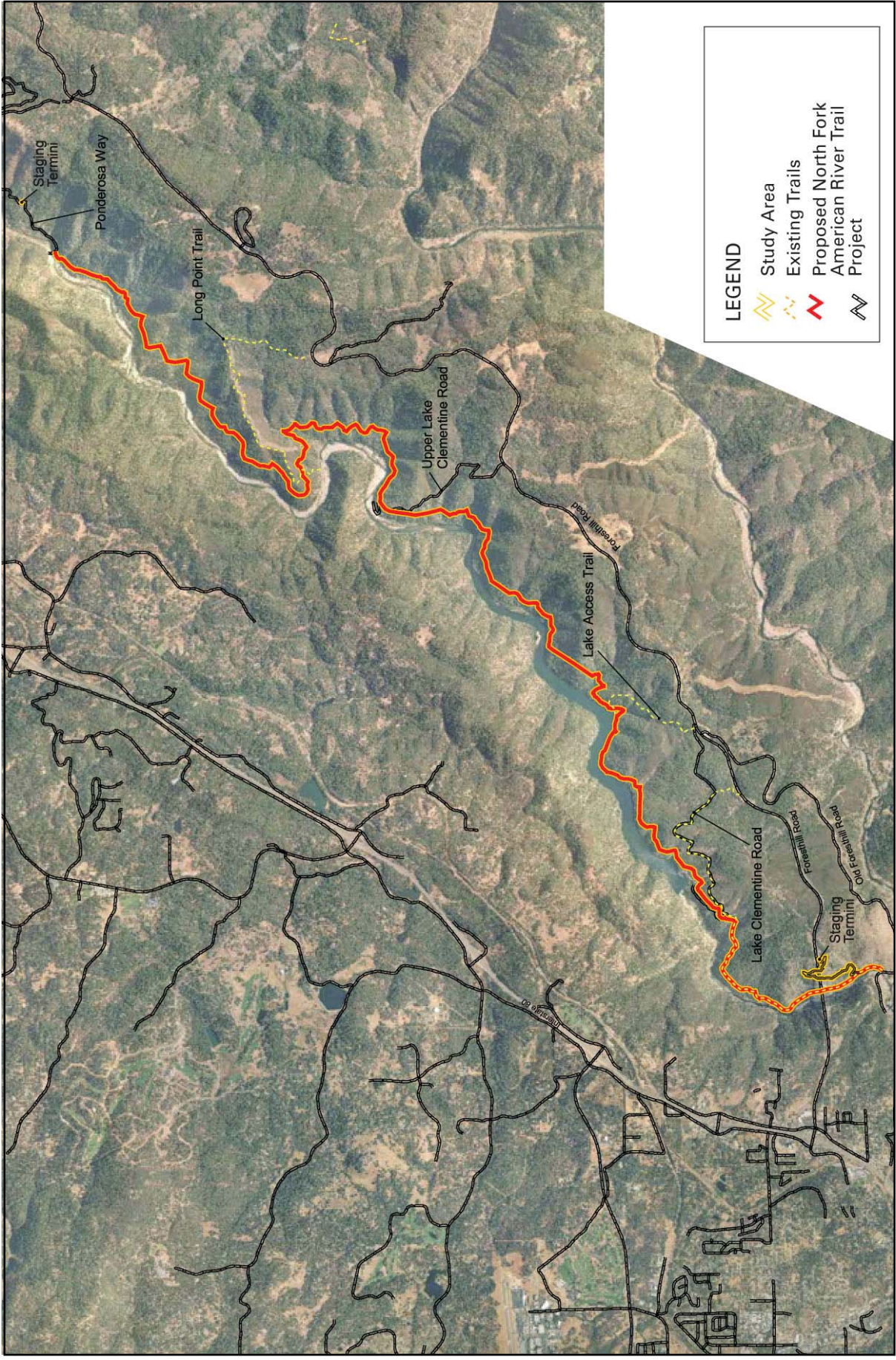
- ▶ Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- ▶ Mineral Resources
- ▶ Population and Housing
- ▶ Public Utilities and Service Systems

EXHIBIT 1: PROJECT LOCATION



Project Location

EXHIBIT 2: TRAIL ALIGNMENT

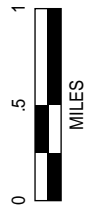


LEGEND

- Study Area
- Existing Trails
- Proposed North Fork American River Trail
- Project

Source: North Fork Associates 2003

Proposed Trail Alignment (Approximate)



Draft – 9/2/05

NORTH FORK TRAIL EIR SCOPING MEETING SUMMARY MEETING NOTES

DATE: Wednesday, August 31, 2005
TIME: 6:00 pm
LOCATION: Placer County Board of Supervisor's Chambers, Auburn, CA

Staff and Consultants Attending:

Jim Durfee, Director, Facilities Services, Placer County	Curtis Alling, EDAW
Albert Ritchie, Placer County	Steve Pavich, EDAW
Andy Fisher, Placer County	

Meeting Purpose:

The purpose of the public meeting is to present a summary of the proposed trail project and seek public comments to help determine the scope of the environmental impact report (EIR) as part of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) process.

Summary Meeting Notes:

Comment by:	Summary of key points:
Jim Durfee	Introduction
	Mr. Durfee opened the meeting and presented the project background. Placer County would like to hear the public's input at this scoping meeting for the EIR. It is premature to have answers to technical questions, because the environmental analysis has not yet been prepared, but technical environmental questions will be addressed in the EIR. There will be ample future opportunity for public input with the release of the Notice of Preparation of the EIR and the public review of the Draft EIR.
Andy Fisher	Summary of the Project
	Mr. Fisher summarized the location and description of the proposed North Fork Trail. Mr. Fisher summarized the objectives of the trail project.
Steve Pavich	Summary of the CEQA Process
	Mr. Pavich summarized the project's upcoming EIR process and general schedule. Mr. Pavich also summarized the environmental topics to be addressed in the EIR.
Unnamed	Public Comments
	Do you have a printout of the PowerPoint presentation?

		A: The county can provide that.
Bob Suter		Mr. Suter represents the North Fork American River Alliance, a newly formed group that is concerned with protecting the wild and scenic state of the river above the proposed project (above Iowa Hill bridge).
		Mr. Suter has experience building trails in the past. This project appears to be very expensive, especially recognizing there is not adequate money for maintenance and patrols.
		A 5-foot-wide trail is an invitation to motorcycles, mountain bikes and equestrians, and use conflicts can happen. There should be substantial funds for enforcement of proper use.
		Mr. Suter urges the County to rethink the alignment, so there is not the need to cut new wide trails, particularly on steep slopes. Existing mining trails, drainage ditches, old roads, and other trails could be used instead.
William Wauters		Mr. Wauters owns property that backs up to public land within the Auburn SRA. He was a member of the Trail Advisory Group (TAG) and several other groups interested in the values of the river.
		Mr. Wauters supports the trail project as it is proposed up to Ponderosa Road; he does not support a trail past the Ponderosa Bridge. He considers the project well thought out, and feels it represents a valid recreation benefit for the community.
Wesley Dill		Mr. Dill supports the project. It is located in the State Recreation Area (SRA) where public access already exists.
		The community needs more trails because it is a rapidly urbanizing area.
		He appreciates that his tax dollars are being spent on projects like this one.
		The environmental issues have been addressed in the planning of the trail.
		Multi-use trails with shared uses can and do work. This is a non-motorized trail and conflicts will not be a big issue.
Cathy Haagen-Smit		Ms. Haagen-Smit represents the International Mountain Biking Association.
		She thought the first environmental review process was adequate as it was. It included a thorough environmental assessment and proposed good mitigation measures.
		She supports the project as it is and is willing to help patrol and maintain the trail.
		She asked when comments should be submitted. A: Comments should be submitted as soon as possible, within the next week or so, so that they can be considered in developing the NOP for the EIR.
Catherine O'Riley		Ms. O'Riley is vehemently opposed to the project. She is the secretary of the North Fork American Alliance and member of Friends of the North Fork, which filed he CEQA lawsuit against the County.
		Between Upper Clementine Road and Ponderosa Road, the trail is an environmental disaster. The river qualifies for "wild and scenic" river designation

		there, but won't be designated because of the proposed Auburn Dam.
		A 5-foot-wide trail in this steep area would require considerable physical disruption and environmental impacts.
		The area has hundreds of miles of existing and historic trails that are in disrepair that could be fixed up instead; this would be a better use of County funds.
		Mountain biking, horseback riding, and hiking would be conflicting uses on the proposed trail.
Suzy Kees		Ms. Kees is affiliated with International Mountain Bike Association and helps patrol the trails of the Auburn SRA. She supports the project.
		Members of her group are docents of the trail and are volunteers that help maintain the trails.
		The proposed trail will help spread out the trail use, which helps achieve safety objectives.
Michael Garabedian		Mr. Garabedian is the president of Friends of the North Fork.
		The North Fork American River is an unparalleled resource from Folsom Lake to the head waters. He has hiked most of the river and all but a couple miles of the flagged trail route.
		The trail alignment travels through very steep side slopes. It is inconceivable how the trail can cross some of those slopes.
		There are many existing old roads and other alignments from the confluence to Upper Clementine Road, and much of the rest of the alignment. Some stretches of the alignment do not have viable routes.
		Very few people use this part of the canyon now. The environmental impacts of placing a trail in the remote areas will be significant, including erosion and visual impacts.
		Why is the trail aligned along the midslope? Is it to see the river? The greatest erosion potential would occur in these segments.
		From Upper Clementine Road to Ponderosa Way, the river canyon is highly remote. The Auburn SRA contemplates a hiking trail only in this area, not a multi-use trail, to protect its remoteness.
		The Friends of the North Fork has prepared written comments that will be given to the County to provide more detail.
		There is a lot of existing erosion in the area of existing trails, and substantial mitigation would be needed. He has specific examples of mitigation needed to protect these parts of the proposed trail from erosion.
		The county soil maps from the confluence to Ponderosa Way show soil types with severe limitations for trail construction because of erosion risk. Significant mitigation will be required.
		The project description needs to state where the passing areas, which would be 9

	feet wide, are located.
	Look at the Basin Plan, erosion control efforts, and non-point source factors from the RWQCB when preparing the EIR.
	Have state agencies been invited here tonight? A: Yes.
	The NOP should be sure to get input from the responsible state agencies.
	State Parks should be the CEQA Lead Agency for this project, not Placer County.
	When walking along the river downstream of the Auburn Dam site, Mr. Garabedian saw the existing multi-use trails. When he reached the proposed trail alignment above the dam site, he realized the challenge of locating a minimum impact trail (inches wide) would be insurmountable, let alone the proposed 4- to 5-foot trail.
	His idea of a trail following the river itself turns out to be a very difficult prospect. Placing a 4- to 5-foot trail with passing zones cannot possibly work in the canyon.
	This EIR is an opportunity to show the proper place to put the trail, even though he thinks the challenge is insurmountable. He strongly supports preparation of the EIR.
	This canyon is an amazing resource and very remote. However, the idea of opening the area to a wide trail is a radical change in the use of the canyon. The influx of people is an environmental, social, cultural, and economic impact that needs to be looked at.
	No one has looked at the overall watershed. This watershed needs an overall assessment. The trail is not a good first step because it would preclude other future uses in the watershed. Is this the place for a trail over the Sierra? I would say no. The EIR should look at the overall watershed.
	He is concerned with process problems. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) has not followed some of the NEPA rules adopted last May. There are requirements that people's ideas are worked out in a collaborative process.
	The previous environmental document was a NEPA/CEQA document. This document needs to be a joint EIR/EIS. We are concerned that this is just a CEQA process. Why isn't Reclamation at the scoping meeting.
Chris Marney	Mr. Marney represents FATRAC. FATRAC is in favor of this proposal to help build and maintain this multi-use trail.
	The EIR should make this trail sustainable with low erosion and good lines of sight for safety.
	South Yuba and North Yuba trails are good examples of multi-use trails in similar settings.
	Trail construction practices should consider trail sustainability.



SIGN-IN SHEET

NAME	ORGANIZATION	ADDRESS (OPTIONAL)	CITY/STATE/ZIP	EMAIL (OPTIONAL)	ADD NAME TO MAILING LIST? (Y/N)
Albert Richie	Placer County			arichie@placer.ca.gov	
ANOR FISHER	PLACER COUNTY			AFISHER@PLACER.CA.GOV	
cathy Haagen-Smit	IMBA	7589 Ridge Rd	Newcastle	chaagen@placer.ca.gov	
Swigg Kees	FATRAC/ ARMBA			admin@placere.org	
Catherine O'Riley	NFARA FNF	14885 Goldstone Dr Grass Valley, CA	95949	canyonspirit@yahoo.com	yes
Michael Garabedian	Friends of the North Fork	7143 Gardenview Ave Citrus Heights CA 95621		916-722-1727 miksgar@gn.net	yes
Wesley Dill	FATRACK	7095 Allen Ln Penryn, CA	95663		yes
Dean Scoville	FATRAC	12130 Persimmon Ter. Auburn, CA 95603	→	dean.scoville@hotmail.com	yes
KEVIN EDWARD	PUBLIC	324 KEVIN CT	AUBURN, CA 95603	inisher@sbglobal.net	Y
WILLIAM WALTERS	PUBLIC - NEIGHBOR LAND OWNER	700 CLIPPER GAP RD	AUBURN CA 95603	-NAME -	ON (DUPLICATES)



North Fork American River Trail

Public Meeting - August 31, 2005

NAME	ORGANIZATION	ADDRESS (OPTIONAL)	CITY/STATE/ZIP	EMAIL (OPTIONAL)	ADD NAME TO MAILING LIST? (Y/N)
SEAN ALLAN	FATRAC	6139 Silverleaf Dr.	Foresthill Ca. 95631	ALLANSX2@USAMEDICA.TV	Y
Mary Allan	FATRAC	6139 Silverleaf Dr.	Foresthill, CA 95631	Allansx2@usamedica.tv	Y
Andy Branaman	FATRAC	236 B Foresthill Ave	Auburn, CA 95603	andy@braman.net	Y
CHRIS MARNY	FATRAC	7112 REYN OAKS WY, SACRAMENTO 95842		cmarny@msn.com	Y
Steve Pavich	EDAW	2022 J St Sac, CA 95814		pavichs@edaw.com	
CURTIS ALLING	EDAW	"		allingc@edaw.com	