MEMORANDUM
PUBLIC WORKS AND FACILITIES
PARKS AND GROUNDS DIVISION
County of Placer

TO: Board of Supervisors
DATE: June 7, 2016
FROM: Ken Grehm, Director of Public Works and Facilities
        By: Lisa Carnahan, Associate Planner
SUBJECT: Letter of Support / Multi-Use Trail Bridge / Auburn State Recreation Area

ACTION REQUESTED
Authorize the Chair of the Board of Supervisors to sign a letter of support for a potential Multi-Use Trail Connectivity Bridge spanning the North Fork of the American River in the China Bar area of the Auburn State Recreation Area.

BACKGROUND
The China Bar area is located within the Auburn State Recreation Area, and is the location of the former Auburn Dam construction site. A previous land bridge connected the trail system on the Placer County side of the North Fork of the American River to the trail system within El Dorado County. This trail system was known as the “Auburn to Cool Trail”. Since the Auburn Dam project was terminated, the river was restored to its previous channel and the land bridge was rendered unusable. This severed the connection between the trails on either side of the river.

According to a letter dated March 17, 2016 from the President of the Protect American River Canyons (PARC) group, the Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report for the Pump Station Project for the Auburn Dam called for the construction of a trail bridge to mitigate the impact from the loss of the land bridge connective link. The PARC letter states both State Parks and the Bureau of Reclamation committed funds to the construction of the bridge, and a bridge feasibility study was conducted by State Parks in 2007, but the multi-use trail bridge was never constructed due to funding challenges.

Both PARC and the City of Auburn have written letters to the State Parks and Recreation and the Bureau of Reclamation to state support for the multi-use trail connectivity bridge. At the request of a Placer County Board of Supervisors member, the attached letter of support has been prepared for signature by the Chair of the Board.

ENVIRONMENTAL
Submission of a letter of support is not a project as defined by CEQA Guidelines Section 15061(b)(3).

FISCAL IMPACT
There is no fiscal impact relating to your Board’s submission of a letter of support to State Parks and the Bureau of Reclamation.

ATTACHMENTS
Support Letter from PARC
Support Letter from the City of Auburn
Proposed Support Letter from the Placer County Board of Supervisors
March 17, 2016

JASON DeWALL
CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF
PARKS AND RECREATION
GOLD FIELDS DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT
7805 FOLSOM AUBURN ROAD
FOLSOM CA 95630

DREW LESSARD
BUREAU OF RECLAMATION
CENTRAL CA AREA OFFICE
AREA MANAGER
7794 FOLSOM DAM ROAD
FOLSOM CA 95630

Dear Messrs. DeWall and Lessard,

We request your assistance to help improve public access to the China Bar area of the Auburn State Recreation Area, and to enhance the recreational value of China Bar by facilitating construction of a recreational bridge across the North Fork of the American River. We ask that these efforts move forward immediately rather than waiting for completion of the new Auburn SRA General Plan/Resource Management Plan.

Public Access

As you know, China Bar is the location of the former Auburn Dam construction site. In 2000 the Bureau of Reclamation agreed to close the Auburn Dam diversion tunnel and restore the North Fork American River to its dewatered river channel at China Bar as part of the Placer County Water Agency pump station project. Central to that decision was a recognition that California law compelled restoring the public’s ability to use this part of the river for recreational purposes.

In 2007 the Auburn Dam diversion tunnel was closed and the river returned to its reconstructed river channel. A five mile stretch of the river that had been closed to recreational boating for more than 40 years was subsequently re-opened for public use in 2008. The pump station project featured a number of recreational enhancements, including man-made rapids in the reconstructed river channel, a concrete riverside path for the use of boaters...
interested in repeat runs down the rapids course, and boater take-outs at
China Bar and Oregon Bar. It also included the creation of a paved parking
lot at the former “batch plant” above China Bar and Oregon Bar,
improvements to the road leading to Oregon Bar, smaller parking areas
closer to the two take-out locations, a new trail from the paved parking lot
down to Oregon Bar, restrooms, and the installation of wooden post and
cable “guardrails” in many places along the paved China Bar access road
leading into the canyon from Maidu Drive in Auburn.

These improvements were all intended to facilitate the safe and convenient
recreational use of the China Bar area by Auburn SRA visitors, and were
supported by recreational user groups looking forward to improved access.
Unfortunately, vehicular access has proven to be much more limited than
anticipated. Management policy has been to open the paved Maidu Drive
China Bar access road only on weekends and holidays during the summer
months (June through September). The remainder of the time the gate at
Maidu Drive is closed. Additionally, the paved access road leading toward
China Bar from Cool, on the El Dorado County side of the river, is never
open to public vehicular use.

In our view these roads should be open to the motoring public on a greatly
expanded basis. Trail use in Auburn SRA and other Sierra foothill parks has
mushroomed in recent years, with hikers, trail runners, mountain bikers and
equestrians all searching for accessible scenic trails they can utilize.
Recreational use of the Auburn SRA continues to grow, with the Confluence
area often reaching its vehicle capacity on weekends, when traffic tends to
back up on Highway 49 as motorists jockey for the few available parking
spaces and slow for the throngs of people walking along the road. Not far
from Auburn SRA, Placer County’s Hidden Falls Preserve parking lots are also
often filled beyond capacity, with vehicles parked for considerable distances
along the approach roads to the preserve.

China Bar, and the paved roads leading to it, can and should offer visitors an
alternative destination that can be easily accessed by vehicle while offering
ready access to the many trails in the China Bar area. While expanding
China Bar access will likely require modest additional operational
expenditures, we believe the public benefits more than justify that
investment. We also suspect that China Bar parking fees will cover much of
the added costs.

Recreational Bridge

We believe it is time to deliver on the promise of a multi-use trail bridge
spanning the North Fork of the American River at China Bar. Such a bridge
would greatly enhance recreational opportunities for China Bar trail users,
creating a key connection between the network of trails on either side of the river.

Prior to the closure of the Auburn Dam diversion tunnel, there was a land bridge across the dewatered river channel that provided this vital link. The pump station project’s EIS/EIR recognized that one unfortunate consequence of the project would be the loss of this “Auburn to Cool Trail” land bridge through the dewatered river channel. While not proposed as part of the pump station project, the EIS/EIR did call for the construction of a trail bridge to mitigate the impact of the loss of this vital trail link and to restore its trail connectivity function. In recognition of their respective shares of responsibility for the severing of the Auburn to Cool Trail, State Parks committed one million dollars and PCWA a half million dollars to the cost of constructing the bridge.

In 2007 State Parks completed a bridge feasibility study that identified several potential bridge construction sites. The proposed bridge project has languished since that time, apparently because of funding challenges presented by estimated construction costs.

In our view there is a compelling need to complete this bridge project. Given the growing popularity of Auburn SRA trails, the proposed bridge would provide tremendous value by opening up more trail options and relieving pressure on currently heavily used trails. The need for a multi-use river crossing linking Auburn trails with Cool-Knickerbocker area trails is particularly acute, since there is no other multi-use river crossing connecting these two trail networks anywhere in the Auburn SRA (Mountain Quarries Railroad Bridge, aka “No Hands Bridge,” is not open to mountain bikers).

The bridge would also serve as a draw for those trail users who choose to utilize the large parking lot at American River Overlook Park in Auburn. Existing trails lead down to China Bar from Overlook Park, which is managed by the Auburn Area Recreation and Park District ("ARD"). ARD is currently developing plans for substantial improvements to the park, including a new paved pathway with connections to existing trails, extensive landscaping, public art, and a viewing platform on the edge of the canyon looking down toward China Bar.

Both the Auburn and Cool economies benefit greatly from trail use in the Auburn SRA. An ever-increasing number of competitive trail events use these trails, including the legendary Western States 100 Mile Run and Tevis Cup 100 Mile Equestrian Ride. Just this March more than 1,000 runners braved rainy, muddy conditions to participate in the Way Too Cool 50K endurance run. Completion of the Auburn to Cool Trail Bridge would allow event organizers to create new race routes utilizing the river crossing,
leading to even greater local economic benefits and increased public use of the currently under-utilized China Bar area.

We urge State Parks and the Bureau of Reclamation to address the China Bar access issues outlined above and to renew their commitment to construction of a trail bridge at China Bar. PARC stands ready to collaborate with your respective agencies on these matters of vital public interest.

Sincerely,

Tim Woodall
Board President
May 10, 2016

JASON DeWALL  
CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF  
PARKS AND RECREATION  
GOLD FIELDS DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT  
7806 FOLSOM AUBURN ROAD  
FOLSOM CA 95630

DREW LESSARD  
BUREAU OF RECLAMATION  
CENTRAL CA AREA OFFICE  
AREA MANAGER  
7794 FOLSOM DAM ROAD  
FOLSOM CA 95630

Dear Mr. DeWall and Mr. Lessard,

The City of Auburn wishes to express its strong support for Protect American River Canyons’ proposal to construct a recreational trail bridge spanning the North Fork of the American River at China Bar within the Auburn State Recreation Area. We would also like to encourage State Parks to take immediate steps to improve access to China Bar by opening the entrance gate on Maidu Drive in Auburn on an expanded basis and open the China Bar parking area.

As you know, the Auburn SRA is a popular destination for a wide variety of recreational users, including hikers, runners, equestrians, and mountain bikers. Auburn SRA draws more than one million visitors annually, and appears to be growing in popularity every year. The Confluence area has become so congested that on many weekends it can be difficult to find a place to park as traffic backs up on Highway 49.

The China Bar area, which is immediately adjacent to Auburn neighborhoods, has tremendous potential as a recreational destination, with its network of trails, pump station rapids, boating takeouts, a bathroom, parking facilities, and the paved Maidu Drive entrance road providing convenient vehicle access.

We believe China Bar is currently under-utilized and that steps should be immediately taken to improve public access. We also believe that

“Endurance Capital of the World”
construction of a trail bridge at China Bar will spur additional use of this portion of the American River canyon by providing a vital link between the existing trails on both sides of the river.

Auburn SRA is a wonderful asset to the Auburn area, enhancing the quality of life for Auburn residents and boosting the Auburn economy. A trail bridge and improved access to China Bar will ensure that Auburn SRA remains a high quality recreational destination by offering visitors another prime destination that can be easily reached by automobile.

On behalf of the Auburn City Council, I would like to thank you for considering the City of Auburn's position on these issues. We look forward to working with your respective agencies in an effort to improve China Bar access and to get the proposed trail bridge built.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

William Krey, MD

Mayor, City of Auburn
June 7, 2016

Jason DeWall, Gold Fields District Superintendent
California Department of Parks and Recreation
7806 Folsom Auburn Road
Folsom, CA 95630

Dear Mr. DeWall:

On behalf of the Placer County Board of Supervisors, I am writing to you in support of the proposed multi-use trail connectivity bridge spanning the North Fork of the American River at the China Bar area of the Auburn State Recreation Area. Construction of the bridge would restore needed connectivity in the trail system from Auburn to Cool.

Municipal Advisory Committees and the general public within Placer County have consistently given feedback to Placer County staff that more public recreation trail systems are desired and needed within the County. The proposed bridge would provide a key connection between Placer County and El Dorado County trail systems, and would provide the public with an expanded trail system which could be enjoyed and appreciated by all.

Placer County wishes to echo the sentiments expressed in the letters of support from both the Protect American River Canyons President, as well as the Mayor of the City of Auburn. The Auburn State Recreation Area is a highly valued recreation area, and the restoration of the vital link connecting the "Auburn to Cool Trail" would greatly enhance the overall experience of citizens and visitors alike.

Should you have any questions regarding the County’s solid support of the multi-use trail connectivity bridge, please feel free to contact either myself or the County Executive Officer David Boesch at 530-889-4031.

Sincerely,

COUNTY OF PLACER

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Jennifer Montgomery, Vice-Chair (District 5)
Placer County Board of Supervisors

Cc: Placer County Board of Supervisors
    David Boesch, County Executive Officer
    Ken Grehm, Public Works and Facility Director
    Drew Lessard, Bureau of Reclamation

E-mail: bos@placer.ca.gov — Web: www.placer.ca.gov/bos
June 7, 2016

Drew Lessard, Area Manager
Bureau of Reclamation Central CA Area Office
7794 Folsom Dam Road
Folsom, CA 95630

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Jennifer Montgomery, Vice-Chair (District 5)
Placer County Board of Supervisors

cc:  Placer County Board of Supervisors
     David Boesch, County Executive Officer
     Ken Grehm, Public Works and Facility Director
     Jason DeWall, California Department of Parks and Recreation

E-mail: bos@placer.ca.gov — Web: www.placer.ca.gov/bos