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Lee Vining, FERC Project No. 1388

RECREATION AND LAND USE TWG 4 MEETING NOTES
MAY 27, 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	Agencies and Interested Stakeholders
Carissa Shoemaker, ERM	Adam Barnett, USFS
Finlay Anderson, Kleinschmidt	Bartshe Miller, Mono Lake Committee
Karen Klosowski, Kleinschmidt	Monique Sanchez, USFS
Kelly Larimer, Kleinschmidt	Nick Buckmaster, CDFW
Martin Ostendorf, SCE	Sheila Irons, USFS
Matthew Harper, Kleinschmidt	Stephen Bowes, NPS
Matthew Woodhall, SCE	
Shannon Luoma, Kleinschmidt	

2. Compiled Action Items

- Relicensing team will distribute draft meeting notes
- Relicensing team will distribute Study Plan outlines with the PAD
- Relicensing team will set September agency meeting dates and send invitations
- Relicensing team will assess the cross-over with Aquatics TWG/Study Plans (including the Hydrology Operations Model) to assess flooding of campground sites, at what water surface elevation and when
- USFS to look at concessionaire's SUP to see if driving in Saddlebag Lake bed is prohibited

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

- Matthew Woodhall provided a Safety moment
- Introductions of team and participants via chat
- Review of notes/comments from April
- Finlay Anderson listed the potential studies / study requests that are being discussed in the other resource TWGs
- Comment: Monique Sanchez, USFS
    - When will draft meeting notes be posted, when do you need our input, and will they include the Study Plan outlines?
    - Response: Finlay Anderson, Relicensing Team – We post the notes when we are confident that we have all the feedback from you all. Let us know if you want more time. The notes would include this May TWG meeting, not the Study Plan outlines. The

Study Plan outlines would be kept at the TWG-level for comments, not posted to the website. However, the notes will capture some of the discussion around the studies. They are high-level and shouldn't take too much time to review.

4. Discussion of Resource Management Objectives / Proposed Studies

- The Relicensing Team discussed the proposed studies, and aspects that have been included from stakeholder requests. Study Plan outlines will have comment matrices showing the aspects we included and those we didn't include for various reasons.
- **Recreation Use Assessment**
  - Expanded dispersed use study area to surround each project reservoir.
  - Both summer and winter activities will be included.
  - Kayaking information will be collected.
- **Facilities Condition Assessment**
  - Includes assessment of sign inventory, fishing line disposal stations, and litter disposal.
  - Interpretive signage needs can be discussed after the studies are completed.
- **Project Boundary, Lands, and Roads**
  - Will look at current Project lands and operations and determine if the Project boundary is appropriate.
  - Questions raised regarding roads will be assessed here, instead of in the facilities condition assessment.
  - Staging areas, materials storage sites, and borrow pits will be assessed.
  - Wilderness boundary error has since been corrected in USFS data and incorporated into Project figures; this change correctly reflects that portions of Ellery Lake and Hwy 120 are not within the USFS wilderness boundary. The Map on SCE's relicensing website has been swapped, and PAD figures have been corrected.
- **Visual Quality Assessment**
  - SCE agrees to perform a visual quality assessment generally based on the study request and examples provided by the USFS.
- Comment: Adam Barnett, USFS –
  - Will there be a more detailed point-by-point response to our requests coming soon?
  - Response: Matt Harper, Relicensing Team – Yes, this will be coming soon, hopefully next week with the Study Plan outlines. We're also discussing these in more detail in this meeting.
- Comment: Adam Barnett, USFS –
  - What is the next step after we internally review your responses to our requests?
  - Response: Finlay Anderson, Relicensing Team – Normally, you would see the Study Plans for the first time when the PAD/NOI are filed, then you'd comment on them. But for this Project, we have front-loaded it, and you are seeing things ahead of time; however, this doesn't eliminate the possibility for you to continue to comment when PAD is filed. We invite you to provide a high-level response back and we can include that in the PAD. We fully expect the conversation about Study Plan goals and objectives to continue once the

PAD is filed. Nothing is final until we go through a more thorough review of the Study Plans with the stakeholders. Starting in August it will be more formal through the FERC TLP process.

- Comment: Monique Sanchez, USFS –
    - A matrix of comments, responses, and the Study Plan outlines will be released together?
    - Response: Finlay Anderson, Relicensing Team – Yes, hopefully next week. We may not wait to put things in the PAD but are also not assuming that you have agreed on everything in the studies still being discussed.
- Team discusses study areas for recreation use and facilities condition assessments. The team agrees that developed sites around each of the Project reservoirs warrant inclusion in the proposed studies but do not consider many other sites proposed in the USFS' study requests to have a nexus to the Project. The team proposed to utilize the first study season for user surveys to determine which sites have a substantial connection to the Project and may warrant broader studies (RUNS, Facilities Condition, Dispersed Use) in a second study season.
- Comment: Adam Barnett, USFS –
    - Appreciate you breaking it down. We all need a better understanding of primary purpose of recreators in the area. It's a substantial investment in quantitative research, is that typical in other relicensing efforts?
    - Response: Finlay Anderson, Relicensing Team – The goal here would be to make sure that the Project use and needs for the future are addressed in the next license term, but ensure that SCE isn't responsible for things unrelated to the Project. There shouldn't be an expectation for SCE to be responsible for things unrelated to the license.
    - Response: Matthew Woodhall, Relicensing Team – Some of the recreation areas are attributable to Project features; Those elements are called out and proposed as study areas; the other areas, we just don't know about, so we want to gather more information before we make the decision to include them in future studies or not.
    - Response: Matt Harper, Relicensing Team – We're at the stage where we want to work on the details and methods with you, the stakeholders, to ensure we gather the data we need at the appropriate locations.
- Comment: Monique Sanchez, USFS –
    - What are the proposed study seasons? How will you determine if you'll do a second season for each study? Since we had such an abnormal amount of use in 2020 because of COVID-19, I'd like to hear back from our recreation specialists as the first season may have odd results. It could be a high or low use year in 2021/2022, having both seasons of data would help us get a better understanding of what is going on.
    - Response: Matt Harper, Relicensing Team – We will work with you all to determine the study seasons. Since we have started the process early, it allows us to have the flexibility to use two study seasons and perhaps let recreation use normalize by the time 2023 field season rolls around. We have had a similar situation at Bishop Creek, where we have had to be flexible in altering schedules and methods to adapt to changes on the ground. Our hope is to gather representative use data for the area, but we will also work closely with this TWG to determine when we need to be flexible and change our methods.

- Response: Finlay Anderson, Relicensing Team – If it was not clear, we should clarify that no data is being collected in 2021. This year we are working on methods and lining out our effort -- Next year we hope is a more normal recreation year. With Bishop Creek, we have learned to expect the unexpected and may need to adapt our methods and approach, as needed. We appreciate you raising this as a concern.

- **Recreation Use Assessment**
  - Comment: Matt Harper, Relicensing Team –
    - Could you provide more detail on what you wanted to characterize or analyze with the Saddlebag Lake water taxi service?
    - Response: Adam Barnett, USFS – This may have been Lawson Reif's concern. In general, the taxi service is conveying people to the back of Saddlebag Lake, so it is part of use for the area and may affect the type of use occurring at the back end of the lake as people can take a boat to carry their stuff instead of having to walk.
    - Response: Sheila Irons, USFS – Lake levels can affect the taxi operation, so that is also tied into the use.
    - Response: Matt Harper, Relicensing Team – We will definitely look into this. If USFS could provide concessionaire and special use permit information, that would be very helpful in characterizing this use.
  - Comment: Matthew Woodhall, Relicensing Team –
    - What is the status of the concessionaire? Has it been repurchased?
    - Response: Sheila Irons, USFS – The same person that runs Tioga Lodge bought it, so they will be starting to operate again sometime soon. Adam may be able to provide their anticipated start date.
  - Comment: Bartshe Miller, Mono Lake Committee –
    - Expressed concerns about a large number of vehicles driving and parking in Saddlebag Lake bottom when water levels are low. The access point observed is near the concessionaire water taxi. Where is this being addressed, is the concessionaire involved, and how does it affect SCE's operations?
    - Response: Matt Harper, Relicensing Team – We could look at this in the dispersed use portion of the study but it might also be appropriate with the Aquatics Water Quality Study if point source is an issue. If it is associated with the concessionaire, I'd think USFS would have restrictions for that.
    - Response: Finlay Anderson, Relicensing Team – Driving in Saddlebag Lake bed is not being addressed in another TWG. If we want to analyze it, this TWG is the right place. I would think that the USFS' Special Use Permit (SUP) would prohibit driving in the lake bed. Have we looked at the SUP for that concessionaire? That is more of a USFS condition/SUP question that we need to look at.
    - Response: Bartshe Miller, Mono Lake Committee – SCE should probably study it to make sure it's actually happening. There is no clear definition between foot traffic, bikes, and off-road vehicles around Saddlebag Lake. It's worth looking at holistically.

- Response: Matthew Woodhall, Relicensing Team – Yes, it would be interesting to look at the SUP and determine if this activity is a prohibited under the SUP.

- Comment: Bartshe Miller, Mono Lake Committee –
  - Mono County is pursuing a grant to improve the road and infrastructure up to Saddlebag Lake. This could be a problem if not done with inter-agency collaboration and SCE to help manage some of the issues we are studying here. The road is beyond repair, and they are considering paving it.
  - Response: Sheila Irons, USFS – That is interesting because it's a county road except there is no instrument in place. It is a big problem. It's related to a permit from the 60s that was never signed.
  - Response: Matthew Woodhall, Relicensing Team – Mono County did reach out to SCE for this grant and proposed all the improvements.
  - Response: Adam Barnett, USFS – The Inyo National Forest has been involved too.
- Comment: Monique Sanchez, USFS –
  - What is being considered with dispersed recreation use? Can we talk about the definition of dispersed?
  - Response: Matt Harper, Relicensing Team – To me, dispersed use refers to any use that is not formally developed or managed. For example, the Saddlebag Lake Trail is within the USFS trail system and is managed by the USFS, but all the spur trails off of it are unmanaged. This is largely my own terminology, so we alter that if it is confusing. I understand that the USFS' definition of dispersed use refers specifically to camping outside of a developed campground. The intent of characterizing these uses is to determine whether they need to be formalized or a management action put in place to prevent the use from happening in the future.
  - Comment: Sheila Irons, USFS – Just so you're aware, the Lee Vining Canyon is called a 'concentrated recreation area' and no dispersed camping is allowed, but that doesn't mean it doesn't actually happen.
  - Comment: Monique Sanchez, USFS - When you say "trails were formalized" do you mean trails that were adopted into the USFS trail system?
  - Response: Matt Harper, Relicensing Team – Yes, if someone is managing it, I'd consider it formalized. If campsites are being used, and it was decided to be turned into a campground, then I would consider it to have been formalized.
- Comment: Matt Harper, Relicensing Team –
  - Could you provide more detail on your request to study access to Ellery Bowl for backcountry skiing and climbing?
  - Response: Adam Barnett, USFS – We're talking about characterizing the use of the area and quantifying that. There are no specific safety concerns that I know of.
  - Response: Matt Harper, Relicensing Team – What would we use the data for?
  - Response: Adam Barnett, USFS – It is a component of winter recreation use in the canyon.

        - Comment: Bartshe Miller, Mono Lake Committee – It's a popular place for people to wander over to get to snow in the spring when the roads first open up. Non-skiers will go there to touch the snow.
- **Facilities Condition Assessment**
    - Comment: Matt Harper, Relicensing Team –
        - Could you provide more detail on your request to evaluate the relationship between flood damage to campgrounds in lower Lee Vining Canyon and project operations? Was this a one time or re-occurring event?
        - Response: Adam Barnett, USFS – This is a routine event in the spring, campsites are being eroded away down Lee Vining Creek, so it could be related to the flow regime.
        - Response: Finlay Anderson, Relicensing Team – We should have someone from Operations on this call, but the approach is to lower the reservoirs as much as possible in winter to collect spring runoff, though there is only so much they can do. The Project is probably preventing more flooding and impacts by regulating flow. We should determine the water surface elevation at which flooding occurs to help us understand the flow regime below Poole Powerhouse. The Hydrology Operations Model can help us understand how often spring runoff exceeds storage capacity based on wet/dry/normal water year. There are elements we can understand with these questions. However, if we think the runoff is in the spring, that may be something outside of what the project can mitigate.
        - Comment: Monique Sanchez, USFS – Looking at flood levels should be easy to measure. The fish habitat study team could take some measurements when they are out there. Knowing when the flood levels cause resource damage is an easy question to answer.
        - Response: Matt Harper, Relicensing Team – We can discuss this with the water group and figure out how best to approach it.
- **Project Boundary, Lands, and Roads**
    - No questions raised
- **Visual Quality Assessment**
    - Comment: Matt Harper, Relicensing Team –
        - USFS was going to check for additional information regarding baseline assessments. Was anything found during that search?
        - Response: Adam Barnett, USFS – Yes, I checked with the FS planner. Unfortunately, we don't have field-based data for this.
    - Comment: Matt Harper, Relicensing Team –
        - Are you proposing to look at impacts of both USFS and SCE facilities? If so, we recognize that there may be efficiencies to look at both during this process but would want to be clear on who is responsible for what efforts.
        - Response: Adam Barnett, USFS – The study request was targeted at SCE facilities, but visual quality observations would likely also capture some USFS facilities, to some extent. And we agree we should be clear about who is responsible for what.

        - Response: Matt Harper, Relicensing Team – As we put the outline together, we can figure out how that would work.
    - Relicensing team believes the existing project is part of the baseline conditions for this study because the management plan considers historic buildings to be part of the baseline.
    - The study would document USFS visual quality objectives, land management plan objectives, and document previous license parameters from the visual plan (paint colors etc.). We want to make sure that we're all on the same page as far as objectives. Existing conditions are the baseline, we don't indent to retroactively going back and modify facilities to meet the new plans objectives.
    - Comment: Adam Barnett, USFS –
        - We want to think about that little, I don't want to rule out the possibility of making adjustments to existing facilities to match up with management plans.
    - Comment: Monique Sanchez, USFS –
        - Usually landscape architects work with the visual study team to figure out how the visual quality impacts visitors' experience. We have done this on other projects.
        - Response: Karen Klosowski, Relicensing Team – Yes, there is usually a cross-over with the recreation user survey and visual survey to obtain site-specific data during recreation surveys.

5. Schedule and Next Steps

- Study Plan outlines will be distributed with the PAD.
- Relicensing team discussed the overall relicensing schedule
- Comment: Adam Barnett, USFS –
    - Is 9/27 week of agency meetings locked in, and are you sending an invite? Should we coordinate internally to set the dates aside?
    - Response: Finlay Anderson, Relicensing Team – We need to coordinate more here with SCE may combine Lee Vining meetings with Bishop Creek meetings in the same week, so we aren't set on those dates quite yet. We'll send out meeting invites as soon as we can.
- Comment: Finlay Anderson, Relicensing Team -
    - Does anyone have any venue suggestions?
    - Response: Monique Sanchez, USFS – Bartshe has mentioned the community center, USFS is still limited with hosting large events.
    - Response: Bartshe Miller, Mono Lake Committee – Yes, usually the community center is used but there are other possible venues.
- Comment: Monique Sanchez, USFS -
    - We are grateful for the opportunity to engage early on this Project.

6. Upcoming TWG Meetings

None proposed at this time, TBD as needed