



News Release

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East Bay Municipal Utility District Keeps Pardee Dam in Water Plan, Supports National Wild and Scenic River designation for the Mokelumne River

In the face of overwhelming opposition and impassioned public testimony, the East Bay Municipal Utility District board voted 4-2 yesterday to include options for a new Pardee Dam in its 2040 water plan. At the same time, the board voted 6-0 to work with foothill interests to secure National Wild and Scenic River designation for the Mokelumne River.

“We’re clearly unhappy with the Pardee result,” said Foothill Conservancy Executive Director Chris Wright. “EBMUD ignored overwhelming opposition from its own constituents; local, state and federal elected officials; organizations; and businesses in approving a plan that could destroy miles of the Mokelumne River.”

The EBMUD board approved its water plan after much debate, following hours of testimony from nearly 70 speakers —foothill residents who traveled to the meeting by bus and local residents who had braved the rain and wind to speak directly to their elected representatives. At the meeting, the dam opponents presented a long list of elected officials, public agencies, organizations and businesses who opposed the Pardee Expansion (attached).

The EBMUD board was split over whether to retain the dam in its plan. A motion by Director Lesa Macintosh to remove the new dam deadlocked on a 3-3 vote. Skillful maneuvering by Director John Coleman, the strongest dam proponent, resulted in a motion that retained four different Pardee options. The smallest would avoid flooding any of the Mokelumne upstream of the existing Pardee Reservoir. The largest would drown the river, cultural and historical resources, Middle Bar Bridge, whitewater recreation areas, and wildlife and fish habitat up to 1,000 feet above the Highway 49 Bridge. Three of the four options drown all or most of the Middle Bar reach of the Mokelumne and the historic 1912 Middle Bar Bridge, and inundate part of the river eligible for National Wild and Scenic River designation.

The Pardee Expansion is “Out of synch with the times we’re in now and where we will be in 20 to 30 years,” said EBMUD President Doug Linney. “It will be an albatross around our neck, a symbol of everything the East Bay Municipal Utility District is not. Taking it off the table forces us to focus on the other solutions. This is about who we are as an organization.”

”National Wild and Scenic River designation is intended to protect the nation’s most important rivers from new dams and diversions,” said Foothill Conservancy Executive Director Chris Wright. “It’s the only way to protect the last flowing sections of the Mokelumne from more

dams. Without that protection, the Mokelumne River and the private property along it will always be at the mercy of three or four water agency directors in some distant city.

“While we’re pleased that EBMUD now supports Wild and Scenic designation, the Middle Bar section of the Mokelumne below Highway 49 is rich in historical and cultural resources, important for recreation and wildlife, and incredibly beautiful. It shouldn’t be written off and reserved for EBMUD to destroy.”

Lesa McIntosh, who made the Wild and Scenic motion, said on Wednesday, “I have enjoyed the Moke River’s beautiful rapids and breathtaking scenery. I am more than happy to support its Wild and Scenic designation. It seems only fitting. I also think it important for EBMUD to not only support this effort, but to also work at assisting in making it happen. The Mokelumne is a jewel.”

The adopted EBMUD board resolution states that the agency will not build a new dam without support from “upcountry” community, government, conservation, historic preservation, business, tribal, and recreation stakeholders. But local river advocates found little comfort in that pledge.

“When it’s convenient, EBMUD and other water agencies describe their ‘Mokelumne River Forum’ as a broad-based and inclusive group. But when they’re being honest about it, they admit the forum is a made up of water agencies,” said Foothill Conservancy Board Vice President Pete Bell. “They kept us out of the room for years and they’ve ignored our concerns so far – and now, they’ve rejected the concerns of our broader community. We’re not sure how a board resolution will change that. It’s clear that EBMUD management wants this dam and will continue to push their board to support it.”

Calaveras County Supervisor Steve Wilensky, an ardent opponent of the Pardee expansion, which would be located in his district, responded when told about the decision early Wednesday, “The EBMUD board showed callous disregard for the people of this region, and their promises for future collaboration ring hollow in light of their action yesterday. Their decision carries the seeds of their own demise, and history and the next election may prove that out.”

Asked what comes next, Conservancy Board President Katherine Evatt said, “We’re weighing our own options on the Pardee decision. Meanwhile, we’ll keep working hard for the Mokelumne Wild and Scenic River designation. The Mokelumne needs permanent protection so that future dams don’t destroy its remaining free-flowing reaches.”

To endorse National Wild and Scenic designation for the Mokelumne River, see www.foothillconservancy.org.

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