

COUNTY OF EL DORADO

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February 23, 2021

Senator Brian Dahle
State Capitol, Room 2054
Sacramento, CA 95814-4900

Assemblymember Frank Bigelow
State Capitol, Room 4158
P.O. Box 942849
Sacramento, CA 94249-0005

Assemblymember Megan Dahle
State Capitol, Room 4208
P.O. Box 942849
Sacramento, CA 94249-0001

Re: State Route 49 Bridge Debris Removal Project

Dear Legislators:

El Dorado County wishes to express its strong support for the project to remove the steel and concrete wreckage of the former State Route (SR) 49 Bridge from the North Fork American River. The bridge debris, located just downstream of the rebuilt SR 49 Bridge within the Auburn State Recreation Area ("Auburn SRA"), constitutes a public safety hazard that needs to be eliminated.

The debris was deposited in the river in December 1964, when the partially completed Hell Hole Dam failed, releasing a wall of water that swept downstream and caused the SR 49 Bridge to be washed away. Shortly after the bridge collapsed, Auburn Dam was authorized to be constructed three miles downstream, which would have resulted in the debris resting at the bottom of a reservoir hundreds of feet deep. Hence a decision, reasonable at the time, was made by Caltrans not to remove the hazardous debris.

Now 56 years later, Auburn Dam has not been built and there are no plans to resume its construction. In the meantime Auburn SRA has become an enormously popular recreational destination, visited by more than one million people annually and continuing to attract more visitors every year. The most popular part of Auburn SRA is the Confluence area, which includes the stretch of river where the bridge debris lies. The continued presence of this hazardous material constitutes a danger to the safety of the many park visitors who hike, swim, and boat in its vicinity.

Auburn SRA is a tremendous asset to El Dorado County, enhancing the quality of life for its residents and boosting the county's economy. The town of Cool is a gateway through which many visitors to the Confluence area travel to reach the river. We believe it is of vital importance that the hazardous bridge debris which endangers the safety of those visitors be removed as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

John Hidahl
Chair, Board of Supervisors
El Dorado County

Cc:
Toks Omishakin, Director
California Department of Transportation
P.O. Box 942873
Sacramento, CA 94276-0001

Amarjeet S. Benipal, District 3 Director
California Department of Transportation
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