

**STAFF REPORT  
INFORMATIONAL  
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**INFORMATIONAL UPDATE ON REMOVAL OF DENNETT DAM**

**PARTIES:**

California State Lands Commission

Tuolumne River Preservation Trust

**BACKGROUND:**

Removal of the remnants of Dennett Dam began in August 2018. Dennett Dam was located on a nontidal section of the Tuolumne River (River), between the cities of Modesto and Ceres in Stanislaus County. The dam was built in 1933 to create a 97-acre recreational swimming area that no longer exists. The dam washed out in 1935, was rebuilt in 1937, and has been in an advanced state of disrepair for many years. The dam was a low-head dam consisting of a low-lying metal and concrete barrier across the river. The approximate middle of the dam was collapsed, which created an even faster current through the breach and turbulent conditions on the downstream side of the dam. The remainder of the dam was in poor condition and debris often became snagged on the top of it. All these conditions posed a serious danger to recreational users of the river, including swimmers, boaters, rafters, and anglers. Since 2006, two children and one adult drowned at the dam.

The dam also posed a physical barrier to migrating fish (Chinook salmon, steelhead, Pacific lamprey, and river lamprey). Central Valley steelhead is an anadromous fish listed under the state and federal Endangered Species Acts, and Central Valley fall-run Chinook salmon and Pacific lamprey are anadromous species of concern or candidates for listing. The River has historically supported the largest run of Chinook salmon in the San Joaquin Valley. Removal of the dam was identified as a priority in multiple anadromous fish restoration reports for the Central Valley. The dam also impacted critical fish habitat. The Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board states one of the River's beneficial uses is that of a cold-water habitat. This habitat is crucial for supporting trout and salmon populations. The pooling that occurred due to the dam contributed to increased water temperatures due to slow water movement and increased solar heating.

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Removal of the dam therefore eliminates a serious threat to human health and safety while also eliminating a physical barrier to recreational navigation and fisheries.

The Tuolumne River Preservation Trust (Trust), established in 1981, is an environmental nonprofit organization advocating for the stewardship of the Tuolumne River from its headwaters in the Sierra Nevada, through the Central Valley, to San Francisco Bay; fighting for the River's restoration, fisheries, and wildlife; and to be safe for drinking, fishing, and swimming for generations to come. The Trust promotes river stewardship through education, community outreach and adventures; collaboration with a diverse array of stakeholders; on-the-ground restoration projects; and advocacy and grassroots organizing to demonstrate public support for its work.

The Trust has been working toward the removal of the dam since 2010 and was a lead in planning and coordinating the removal of the dam. The total cost to remove the dam was \$1.6 million, with the Commission contributing \$500,000 to the effort and issuing a lease to the Trust for the removal activities ([Item C31, December 6, 2016](#)). The Commission received \$133,000 in its 2014-15 budget to prepare the environmental analysis pursuant to CEQA, engineering plans, and a sediment toxicity analysis to help support removal activities. The Commission received an additional \$367,000 in its 2016-17 budget to help fund the removal of the dam. These additional funds were contingent on matching funds being provided. The Trust was instrumental in obtaining the matching funds and implementing the removal project in a comprehensive and efficient manner.

Removal activities started on August 1, 2018 with the construction and installation of the cofferdams. Water was diverted into the diversion channel on August 14, 2018. The actual removal of Dennett Dam was conducted between August 20 and August 22. The removal of the temporary upstream sheet pile dam occurred between September 19 and 21. Hydroseeding of the area occurred on October 5. The Trust is commemorating the Dennett Dam removal with a celebration on October 18, 2018.

The removal of the dam eliminates the ongoing tort liability of the State caused by the presence of a deteriorating structure on sovereign land, improves recreational boating on the Tuolumne River, and improves anadromous fish passage and habitat. The removal of the dam also facilitates the Lower Tuolumne River Parkway development concept for a 500-acre park extending for 7 miles along the River to increase recreational opportunities within the region.

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**OTHER PERTINENT INFORMATION:**

1. This action is consistent with Strategy 1.1 of the Commission's Strategic Plan to deliver the highest levels of public health and safety in the protection, preservation and responsible economic use of the lands and resources under the Commission's jurisdiction; Key Action 1.2.4 to prioritize the use of sovereign lands where appropriate for open space, wetlands, riparian habitat and habitat preservation, restoration, and enhancement, including through habitat management plans, mitigation agreements with public agencies, private parties, and other conservation efforts consistent with applicable law; Strategy 1.3 to protect, expand, and enhance appropriate public use and access to and along the State's inland and coastal waterways; Strategy 2.3 to align budget and policy initiatives and staff resources with Commission and State priorities, including securing stable funding sources and resources to fulfill the Commission's mission and vision.
  
2. The informational update of the removal of Dennett Dam is not a project as defined by the California Environmental Quality Act because it is an administrative action that will not result in direct or indirect physical changes in the environment.

Authority: Public Resources Code section 21065 and California Code of Regulations, title 14, section 15378, subdivision (b)(5).

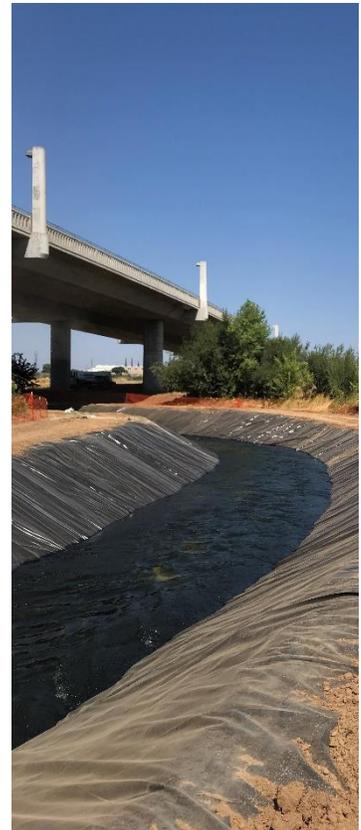
**EXHIBITS:**

- A-1. Photos of Dennett Dam Before Removal
- A-2. Photos of Dennett Dam During Removal Activities
- A-3. Photos of Tuolumne River After Removal of Dennett Dam

EXHIBIT A-1  
Dennett Dam



EXHIBIT A-2  
Dennett Dam Removal Water Diversion



**EXHIBIT A-3**  
After Dennett Dam Removal

