



www.americanwhitewater.org

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November 15, 2013

Superintendent Mike Lynch
Auburn State Recreation Area
501 El Dorado Street
Auburn, CA 95604

Re: River Camping / Fire Policy in the Auburn State Recreation Area

Dear Superintendent Lynch,

We are writing you in regards to your river camping restrictions for the Middle Fork American River within the Auburn State Recreation Area. It has recently come to our attention that the camping policies for noncommercial paddlers are inconsistent with the resource goals and objectives that we worked with your staff to protect and improve during the relicensing process.

American Whitewater has significant interest in whitewater paddlers' ability to enjoy the Middle Fork American River. For over six years we worked alongside your staff as part of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's relicensing process for the Placer County Water Agency's Middle Fork American River hydroelectric project. Through this process we were able to improve the river flows and facilities that will provide significant benefits to the whitewater boating community.

In reviewing your existing policies that restrict river camping along the Middle Fork American River, it appears that the major concern from State Parks is related to fire risk in the Recreation Area. State Parks Fire Policy, as outlined in Policy #03-001, states:

"As of July 1st of each year, or earlier if declared by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF), Nevada-Yuba-Placer Unit (NEU), and fire conditions warrant, the river camping program and the use of all above ground charcoal and propane barbeques except in designated campgrounds will be suspended."

We certainly share the concern regarding fire danger, particularly during the dry summer months. Restrictions on campfires and above ground barbeques outside of designated campgrounds are reasonable restrictions. A clear rationale is given in

the policy as to why these activities are not allowed during times of extreme fire danger. Our issue rests with State Parks decision to include a ban on river camping as part of this policy. It is unclear how river camping will increase fire risk, particularly if river campers are under the same fire restrictions as other campers. There is no rationale given within the policy to explain why river camping is banned. It is also troubling that no other camping activities are banned, or even restricted, as part of this policy. In fact, even the use of aboveground barbecues or having a campfire is allowed if it occurs within a designated campsite. It is also unclear as to why this ban only applies to private boaters who wish to float the river. Commercial outfitters are not restricted as part of this policy. We are concerned that the only way that paddlers can enjoy a river camping experience on the Middle Fork American River is to pay an outfitter to take them down the river. We do not believe that this targeting of whitewater paddlers is the intent of this policy, but it is the reality.

In at least one instance, your department has issued a citation to a whitewater boater for camping alongside of the Middle Fork American River, and misdemeanor criminal charges are pending. In the spirit of cooperation between our organization and your department, we urge you to withdraw this citation while we work together to implement a fair and reasonable policy that meets your legitimate objectives in a rational manner without unduly restricting the recreational use of the river. It is our interest to meet with you to better understand your concerns as related to fire issues during the summer months. We would also like to discuss ways in which noncommercial paddlers can enjoy the Middle Fork American River during the prime camping season in a way that meets the fire concerns of State Parks.

Please let me know when you will be available to discuss this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Dave Steindorf". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Dave Steindorf
California Stewardship Director

cc: Bill Deitchman, State Park Ranger Whitewater Program Manager