



May 1, 2014

John Svahn, Stewardship Director
Truckee Donner Land Trust
10069 W River St.
Truckee, California, 96161

Dear John Svahn,

We are pleased to support your plan to notch the Van Norden Dam to secure the safety of homeowner's downstream and to restore a large portion of the montane meadow. The dam is out of compliance with the State Division of Safety of Dams and Department of Water Resources regulations, is deemed to be of "significant hazard" according to U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Reclamation guidelines, and poses a threat of loss of life if the dam were to break.

The proposal by Truckee Donner Land Trust to notch the dam by 4.5 ft. and an additional 0.5 ft. in the center of the spillway will reduce the lake to 5-acre feet from approximately 175-acre feet. The new spillway configuration maximizes the remaining lake area while meeting the "low hazard" classification for dam safety. The notching will reduce the open water area for recreation, change the aesthetics, and reduce the foraging habitat for white pelicans, osprey, and bald eagles. However, there will be important meadow restoration gains for many plant and wildlife species along with improved ecosystem services for people. Notching the dam represents a compromise between requirements for dam safety, meadow restoration, and maintaining some lake area.

The notching will likely result in expansion of willow thickets and additional Willow Flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii*) habitat, a species listed as endangered by the State of California. The expansion of the meadow area will also result in a more natural flow regime in the headwaters of the South Yuba River. Functioning meadows can attenuate flood flows, sustain base flows, and filter the water, all important ecosystem services. Balance Hydrologics along with partners gathered additional information on the biological resources, heritage resources, and impacts associated with dam notching in a report titled *Lake Van Norden and Van Norden Meadow Assessment Report*.

We recognize that dam notching may be a first step towards a larger restoration effort for Van Norden meadow. The intention of the Truckee Donner Land Trust is to resell the meadow to the U.S. Forest Service in the future. The University of California, Davis, Gateway Mountain Center, and Balance Hydrologics have collected data on the hydrology and wildlife and plant habitat of the meadow, which will serve as a baseline for this restoration effort. Notching the dam will not only reduce the risk of a dam break, but provides an opportunity to advance the understanding of meadow restoration through monitoring and evaluation of restoration success.

Sincerely,

Kristen Podolak, The Nature Conservancy, kpodolak@tnc.org

Luke Hunt, American Rivers, lhunt@americanrivers.org

Rachel Hutchinson, South Yuba River Citizens League, rachel@syrcl.org