



**For Immediate Release**  
**Monday, August 17, 2009**

## **Accidental Release of Water from Canal Quickly Controlled** **Assessment of potential environmental damage underway**

**Placerville, CA . . .** An accidental release of water into an emergency spillway along El Dorado Irrigation District's (district) canal system was brought under control within an hour and posed no threat to public health and safety or to property, according to district officials.

"This event took place in a remote area with little public access," said the district's interim general manager Tom Cumpston. "The main concern is any environmental damage that may have been caused by the water flowing down the spillway channel. There was no immediate indication of environmental damage to the South Fork American River, and we are continuing to watch conditions closely."

Cumpston said the release occurred in early afternoon on Wednesday, August 12, when water flowing through the canal system about a mile upstream of Forebay Reservoir in Pollock Pines was accidentally diverted through Spillway 47C. The spillway empties into Randolph Creek, which in turn flows into the South Fork of the American River a few miles upstream of Slab Creek Reservoir.

As part of the district's Project 184, the canal system delivers water from four alpine lakes for hydropower generation at the district's powerhouse, located downstream from the point of the release. Some of the water is also treated for drinking water.

"Spillway 47C is one of the older parts of the canal system," Cumpston said. "It is to be used only in emergencies because the spillway channel is highly erosive. As soon as we detected the release through our remote sensing monitoring system, we sent a crew to close the spillway's gates, and we opened two regularly used upstream spillways to stop water already moving through the system from reaching Spillway 47C. Our crews accomplished all of the work inside of an hour. At that time, we resumed normal canal operations.

"We also began taking water samples in the South Fork American River to determine the extent of any environmental damage that may have occurred due to the erosive conditions. We continued to take samples and make visual surveys during the next several days and throughout the weekend to assess the extent of increased turbidity levels in the river. Staff conducted on-the-ground inspections Friday in the steep terrain between the spillway and Randolph Creek. We are now assessing the information collected during our investigations and sampling."

Cumpston said that on Wednesday, the district notified the appropriate authorities about the release. Included in the notification were the U.S. Forest Service, the California Department of Fish and Game, the State Water Resources Control Board, and the State Office of Emergency Services. On Thursday, district staff discussed the incident with the Project 184 Ecological Resources Committee during the committee's regular meeting. On Friday, staff reported the incident and current status to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), the agency that granted EID's license to operate the hydropower system. Under the license, the district has committed to a schedule for upgrading or replacing aging portions of the canal system. Replacement of Spillway 47C, which is one of 30 spillways authorized for use under a plan approved by the resource agencies and FERC, is scheduled to begin in 2011.

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District staff reported that flows in the canal were at about 90 cubic feet per second when the water was released into the spillway. “We estimate that upward of one million gallons of water may have been released,” Cumpston said. “That’s significant, but it won’t affect our customers’ water supply. Forebay Reservoir holds more than 80 million gallons. Also, only about 30 percent of the water that was released would have been diverted to our treatment plant, while the rest was on its way to the powerhouse. Thanks to our employees’ rapid response, we were able to minimize the loss.”

The cause of the release has not yet been determined and is being investigated by the district.

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**For more information, contact Deanne Kloepfer at 530-622-4513.**