

Watershed Forum Concept Proposal
Plumas County Flood Control & Conservation District

March 24, 2023

Rob Thorman, Assistant Director
Plumas County Public Works
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(530)283-6495

Dear Mr. Thorman:

Please find within this letter a Watershed Forum Concept Proposal.

Project Name: Taylorsville Mill Race Farmers' Dam Resurfacing

Project Sponsor: Taylorsville Mill Race Group

Statement of Qualifications: Water users in collaboration with local resource staff from the U.C. Cooperative Extension encompass decades of successful land and water management.

Project Location:

Taylorsville Mill Race Farmers' Dam (40° 03' 51" N; 120° 49' 47" W) and associated ditch system.



General Project Description:

The Taylorsville Mill Race irrigation system can trace its beginnings to the founding of the community of Taylorsville by Jobe Taylor. The original main ditch was dug by Chinese labor in the 1850s and provided water to power a grist and a lumber mill operated by Jobe Taylor. Area farmers utilized the “tail water” from the mills to irrigate crops and pastureland. When the mills ceased operation, farmers and ranchers continued to utilize the ditch system and water rights. Now part of the Indian Creek Decree (No. 4185), the Taylorsville Mill Race represents the largest diversion right (No. 54) within the decree and its associated watermaster service area. There are eleven shares or water rights held by landowners that make up the non-profit Taylorsville Mill Race Group, irrigating approximately 3,000 acres.

Historically an earthen dam was built prior to the irrigation season that diverted water in Indian Creek for the Taylorsville Mill Race diversion; however, in the 1940s or 1950s (exact year not known), a more permanent cement dam was built that provided for a more reliable system and less disruption and damage to the stream flow and the adjacent banks of Indian Creek. This structure is maintained by the non-profit group of users who are organized under the name of the Taylorsville Mill Race Group, and is commonly referred to as the Farmers’ Dam.

In 1986, the group undertook the work of resurfacing the face of the dam to repair damage and ensure its continued viability. This project was completed by members of the group with significant amounts of in-kind labor and donated expertise and equipment, but still cost the participants \$34,400 (Holly Foster interview with Charlie Neer, C. Neer Construction Co., May 30, 2015). The Mill Race Group has identified the need to resurface the dam again in the near future (within the next 10 years); however, due to additional requirements for permitting and engineering, the project is being budgeted at an estimated \$150,000 to \$200,000 to complete.

There are two secondary aspects to improving the reliability and efficiency of the Taylorsville Mill Race Farmers’ Dam:

1. Replacement of the existing head gate, as well as resurfacing and updating the surrounding structure.
2. Channel cleaning of the existing ditch system is also a necessary component to the overall reliability and integrity of the system and its ability manage excess runoff, minimize sedimentation and offer a reliable water supply for agricultural uses, habitat and groundwater recharge, as well as fire suppression.

Additional Background

In addition to supporting the irrigation on approximately nine family-owned livestock and hay operations in Indian Valley, the Taylorsville Mill Race and Farmers’ Dam represents an important historical structure within the valley. The associated ditch system provides for a source of conjunctive water management for ranching and farming operations that utilize both ground and surface water. The ditch system provides important wildlife habitat, as well as flood control for the valley during periods of excessive precipitation. The Mill Race and its associated water supply also serves as important component to wildland fire suppression for the Indian Valley area and its residents, which was demonstrated during the 2021 Dixie Fire.

Taylorsville Mill Race Group members have participated in the Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program since 2008. In February 2022, the irrigators of the entire Feather River Watershed were granted an exemption from this regulatory program by the Regional Water Board in recognition of landowner efforts in water monitoring and reporting, as well as runoff management. The Taylorsville Mill Race and its associated structures are an important component to continue this effort and to manage water responsibly in Indian Valley for the benefit of the entire area and community.

This project meets the following goals of the Monterey Settlement Agreement as previously described:

1. Improve water retention for baseflow in streams
2. Improve water quality and streambank protection

3. Improve upland vegetation management
4. Improve groundwater retention and storage in major aquifers

This project meets the following Goals and Objectives that are part of the draft Upper Feather River Water Management Plan:

Goals

- Protect and improve water quality and water supply reliability.
- Protect and improve the health of the environment, including fish, wildlife and the land.
- Protect and improve the economy of the region, and provide health and adequate water and wastewater treatment for all citizens, including disadvantaged communities and Native Americans.
- Protect and enhance the health and economic viability of working landscapes.

Objectives

- Reduce potential for catastrophic wildland fires in the region.
- Balance the needs of forest health, habitat preservation, fuels reduction, forest fire prevention, and economic activity in the Upper Feather River Region.
- Protect, restore, and enhance the quality of surface and groundwater resources for all beneficial uses, consistent with the Basin Plan.
- Coordinate management of recharge areas and protect groundwater resources.
- Improve coordination of land use and water resources planning.
- Maximize agricultural, environmental and municipal water use efficiency.
- Improve efficiency and reliability of water supply and other water-related infrastructure.
- Address economic challenges of agricultural producers.

Gross Cost Estimate and Project Schedule

\$150,000 to \$200,000

Year I

Requests for proposals for permitting and engineering technical assistance.

Year II and III

Project implementation

Funding Sources

In-kind technical expertise provided by U.C. Cooperative Extension and Rancher Technical Assistance Program (RTAP)

Conclusion

We appreciate your consideration of this initial concept proposal. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us if any additional information is required.

Sincerely,

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