

STATE OF CALIFORNIA
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

February 6, 1992

Mr. Mark Batkin
Central Valley Region
California Regional Water Quality Control Board
3443 Routier Road, Suite A
Sacramento, Calif. 95827-3098

Dear Mr. Batkin:

This is in response to your request for information regarding the turbidity in the South Fork of the American River during October and November of 1991. On Friday October 25, 1991 and Saturday October 26, 1991, the South Fork water shed received in excess of five inches of rain. I was on vacation until October 29, 1991 at which time I crossed the South Fork of the American River at Coloma and noticed the river was very low (near minimum flow) and extremely muddy. At that time I suspected that PG&E had probably sluiced their dam at Chili Bar in hopes of hiding the activity with the runoff from the storm. Later that day I crossed the river at Chili Bar and noted that Chili Bar Reservoir was also very low and muddy. This muddy condition continued, but due to it being the closing week of the deer season, I was too busy to investigate further. On Friday November 1, 1991, I crossed the South Fork of the American River at the Camino Power House and observed that the Slab Creek Reservoir had also been drawn down.

The muddy conditions continued as did the low flows so I contacted Warden Ken Ball and asked if he had any knowledge of any event that might be making the river muddy. Warden Ball advised that he had been advised that the river was muddy, but had no knowledge of a cause. On November 5, 1991 I was in the Region II office when a citizen called to complain about the muddy water. I checked with our Environmental Services Branch to see if they had been contacted on the situation and to express my concern for the effects of the silt on the fall brown trout spawn. Jerry Menche advised he had not been contacted and suggested I call SMUD and PG&E to determine if their operations might be causing the problem. I called SMUD at the Fresh Pond Office and was told that they too had received complaints and they had sent someone out to Slab Creek Reservoir to check for a problem. A short while later another SMUD representative called and advised that they had discovered that they did not

have the working space in the Slab Creek Reservoir that they thought they had due to the reservoir silting in. This was not discovered until the level had been drawn down to do repairs on the White Rock Power House. As a result of the draw down, the water was flowing across a silt bottom. The representative advised that they were going to let the reservoir fill up above the silt level before starting operation at White Rock Power House, which might take up to a week, or they could start operation immediately and increase the flow in the river. I advised them that I felt it would be better to increase the flow to flush the spawning gravels. The representative advised that the flows would be increased as soon as possible and the river began to clear in a couple of days.

Robert Pitt