

**August 6, 2004**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

*Auburn* - Note: File photos of the Ralston gates are available via email on request. Please contact Dave Carter at ncnews@sbcglobal.net.

AUBURN -- The Placer County Water Agency is investigating the cause of a release gate failure that led to a surge of water Thursday morning (Aug. 5) on the Middle Fork American River.

PCWA General Manager David Breninger and Power System Manager Steve Jones reported on the incident at Thursday's regular meeting of the PCWA Board of Directors.

Jones said more than 1000 acre-feet of water gushed through two of the five gates on the dam at Ralston Afterbay, below the Oxbow Powerhouse about 30 miles upstream from Folsom Reservoir.

He said the accidental release occurred between 6 a.m. and 7:40 a.m. during a routine testing procedure at the powerhouse but was not discovered until an alarm alerted crews to low water conditions in the afterbay.

Jones attributed the incident to the malfunction of both an electrical switching device at Oxbow Powerhouse, as well as a controller switch that operates Gate 1 and 4 at Ralston Dam. The other three gates at Ralston Dam were not affected and remained closed, he said.

Breninger said there were no known injuries or damages from the incident. He credited Placer County and state agencies for their swift response after PCWA initiated its emergency action plan.

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Campers and recreationists along the river were notified, in some cases by helicopter, and asked to evacuate low areas along the river.

The release of water lowered the level of the small reservoir by about 25 feet and caused a brief rise in the river estimated at three to four feet. Officials said water levels were higher than normal for this time of year but lower than a typical winter storm.

Jones said that after reports of the incident observers gathered downstream at the confluence of the middle and north forks of the river but that few effects were apparent there.

Officials said the gates would be controlled manually while cause of the incident is determined and repairs are made.