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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Auburn - As part of its current reorganization through the California Public Utilities Commission, the Pacific Gas and Electric Company is making plans to protect more than 140,000 acres of watershed lands across the Sierra associated with its hydroelectric projects.

The PG&E land conservation commitment was the subject of a presentation made Thursday (Mar. 17) to the Placer County Water Agency Board of Directors by representatives of the utility company and the independent, nonprofit Watershed Lands Stewardship Council.

PG&E project manager Mike Schonherr said the watershed lands are vast and dispersed, covering more than 221 square miles in 22 California counties. The lands include more than 7,900 acres in Placer County and 10,600 acres in Nevada County on watershed that is the source of water to Placer County homes, farms and businesses.

Schonherr said the company's goals, as outlined in a settlement with the CPUC, are to permanently protect the lands and to develop wilderness and educational opportunities for youth.

How the lands will be used in coming years will be decided through the Stewardship Council, which includes a broad range of interest groups. Jayne Battey, the council's executive director, and Lisa Whitman, its public outreach manager, attended the PCWA presentation.

Members of the PCWA board expressed support for the effort. Director Otis Wollan called it "an incredible opportunity." Director Alex Ferreira added, "It is important to clarify now how the land will be used in the future."

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General Manager David Breninger offered the agency's support and assistance for a local watershed tour that PG&E and the council are planning for late summer.

In other business, PCWA directors:

- heard that Michael Cooper, Director of Administrative Services, will be retiring from the Agency effective August 5, 2005, after more than 13 years with PCWA and over 30 years in local government management.

- opened and continued to May 5 a public hearing on annexation to PCWA Zone 4 of the 475-acre Eaglewood development in eastern Placer County's Martis Valley. The continuation was recommended because of continuing litigation in the eastern county over approval of the residential/golf course development.

- approved bond counsel and underwriter agreements for the potential refinancing of outstanding certificates of participation (COPs). Director of Finance Joseph Parker said today's more favorable interest rates could allow the agency to save \$1.5 million or more in retiring the long-term debt.

- adopted an updated and revised package of financial policies, including a general financial policy, fixed asset policy and reserve designation policy.

- agreed to extend by five years the agency's existing lease of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation corporation yard on Maidu Drive in Auburn. The PCWA Field Services Division has been headquartered at the site since 2000.

- heard a report from Technical Services Director Brian Martin that work is expected to begin later this month on the planned upgrade and expansion of the PCWA Auburn Water Treatment Plant. The project is expected to be completed in 2007.

The PCWA Board of Directors will next meet in adjourned session beginning at 2 p.m. on Mar. 31 at the PCWA Business Center, 144 Ferguson Road, in Auburn. The board's next regular meeting is scheduled for 3 p.m. on Apr. 7 in the Placer County Board of Supervisors chambers, 175 Fulweiler Avenue, in Auburn. PCWA board meetings are open to the public.