



## **NEWS RELEASE**

### **Placer County Water Agency**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

#### **SPECIAL TO ACWA NEWS:**

#### **Watershed Restoration Follows Big Fire on the American River**

*AUBURN* -- The 13-day Ralston Forest Fire burned power and communication poles and lines and scorched power generation facilities of the Placer County Water Agency's Middle Fork American River Project.

The fire began Sept. 5 in the American River canyon about 20 miles east of Auburn. It burned 8,423 acres before it was finally contained on Sept. 17. More than 1300 firefighters were at the scene and suppression costs were estimated at \$13.1 million.

All of the burned area is in the Middle Fork American River watershed. Water agency officials are coordinating with the U.S. Forest Service on post-fire rehabilitation planning with emphasis on siltation prevention to water storage and power generation systems.

The fire burned along the steep, narrow and winding Mosquito Ridge and Ralston Ridge Roads, charring trees and brush, loosening root structures and causing earth and rock slides. The rolling and falling debris endangered firefighters during the fire and continues to pose a threat to vehicles on roads passing beneath unstable areas.

The U.S. Forest Service and water agency are assessing the roadway and anticipate implementing stabilization measures before heavy winter rains to help reduce

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erosion. However, Forest Service hydrologist Rick Weaver said potential for rock falls will continue for the next winter or two until the burn area stabilizes with new growth.

Of the total fire acreage, Forest Service officials assessed severe fire damage on 262 acres, moderate damage on 2,031 acres and low or no damage on 6,130 acres. Much of the damage to PCWA assets occurred during the first few days of the fire which was in the severe and moderate acres that burned.

Once the fire was contained, power lines in the area were quickly repaired in cooperation with PCWA's power purchase contractor Pacific Gas & Electric Company. PCWA was able to return its power plants to full operation on September 20.

Cause of the fire is still under investigation.

PCWA District 5 Director Otis Wollan, whose district includes the burned forest lands, said the fire demonstrates the need for effective watershed management.

"Sediment clearly has an impact on our system," he told the Auburn Journal newspaper, "and management of the watershed has an impact on sediment."

The PCWA Middle Fork American River Project generates 240 megawatts and includes two major reservoirs (French Meadows and Hell Hole), five hydroelectric power plants and related facilities. The water agency is also in process of renewing the original 50-year federal license it obtained in 1963 when they developed the County's area-of-origin water for water supply and hydropower generation.