

STUDY DESCRIPTION VR-1
Visual Resource Evaluation at Project Facilities
June 3, 2026

This Study Description is developed to inform information gaps identified by Calaveras County Water District (CCWD) for the relicensing of its North Fork Stanislaus River Hydroelectric Project (Project).¹

STUDY AREA

The Study Area includes the aboveground Project facilities and features within the proposed Project boundary on federal lands (Table 1) and their associated viewsheds. Federal lands in the Project boundary include National Forest System (NFS) lands managed by the United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, as part of the Stanislaus National Forest (STF), and federal lands administered by the United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation or BOR) as part of the New Melones Complex.²

Sampling Locations

Table 1. Aboveground Project facilities and features.

Area	Project Facility Complex ¹	Facility Type	Land Ownership & Management
North Fork Diversion Dam Impoundment	North Fork Diversion Dam, Spillway, and Intake	Hydroelectric	Federal (STF)
New Spicer Meadow Reservoir	North Fork Diversion Tunnel Outlet and Outlet Channel	Hydroelectric	Federal (STF)
	New Spicer Meadow Dam, Saddle Dam, Spillway, and Power Intake	Hydroelectric	Federal (STF)
	New Spicer Meadow Powerhouse and Switchyard	Hydroelectric	Federal (STF)
	New Spicer Meadow Campground	Recreation	Federal (STF)
	New Spicer Meadow Group Campground	Recreation	Federal (STF)
	New Spicer Meadow Boat Launch and Day Use Area	Recreation	Federal (STF)
Beaver Creek Diversion Dam Impoundment	Beaver Creek Diversion Dam, Spillway, Intake, and Low Level Outlet	Hydroelectric	Federal (STF)
McKays Point Diversion Dam Impoundment	McKays Point Diversion Dam, Spillway, Low Level Outlet	Hydroelectric	Federal (STF)
	Collierville Tunnel Intake	Hydroelectric	Federal (STF)
	Beaver Creek Tunnel Outlet	Hydroelectric	Federal (STF)
Collierville Powerhouse	Collierville Powerhouse and Tailrace	Hydroelectric	Federal (BOR)
	Collierville Switchyard	Hydroelectric	Federal (BOR)

¹ Many of the Project facilities overlap or are situated together or abutting in an overall complex of facilities. Thus, from a viewer's perspective, these facilities are viewed as a complex - not as separate, standalone facilities.

¹ In addition to the details provided in this study description, study implementation will also follow the "*Concepts and Practices Applicable to All Relicensing Studies*" developed by CCWD.

² The Project includes Adit 4, which is located on federal lands administered by the United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management. Adit 4 is not included in the study because it is not readily visible from prominent public viewpoints.

STUDY METHODS

Excluding Data Summary Development (i.e., Reporting), the Study consists of two steps: 1) Gather Information and Mapping; and 2) Field Evaluation. Each step is described below.

Step 1 – Gather Information and Mapping

CCWD will perform the following information gathering and mapping tasks.

- Identify and map reasonable viewsheds associated with the Project facilities and features identified in Table 1.
- Map and summarize the STF Visual Quality Objectives (VQOs) potentially related to the Project facilities and features on NFS lands (Forest Service 1974, Forest Service 1991, Forest Service 2017).³ Reclamation does not have visual objectives associated with federal lands that Reclamation administers.
- Map the location of the Project facilities and features in Table 1 with respect to their associated foreground, middleground, and background viewsheds and, if on NFS lands, VQOs, as applicable.
- Identify Key Observation Points (KOPs) with critical views where photographs will be taken based on the list of Project facilities and features using typical photographic protocols (i.e., using a 55-millimeter camera lens or equivalent). KOPs will be located where prominent public viewpoints exist.

Step 2 - Field Evaluation

CCWD will perform the following field-related evaluation of the existing visual condition (EVC).

- Document the EVC of the Project facilities and features in the field from the established KOPs.
- Photo-document the observed EVC from each KOP of the Project facilities and features.
- Develop a map and describe the location of each KOP following the field evaluation.

³ CCWD is utilizing the Forest Service's 1974 Visual Management System (VMS) which uses VQOs since the current 1991 STF Land and Resource Management Plan and 2017 STF Forest Plan Direction uses the VMS/VQOs and not the Forest Service's updated 1995 Scenery Management System (SMS). The SMS system retained the basic inventory elements of the VMS but moved from VQOs to scenic integrity objectives (SIOs) with different terminology.

REPORTING

CCWD will analyze the field data to include tables and photos. Study data will be made available to all interested parties (See Concepts and Practices Applicable to All Relicensing Studies) and standard GIS shapefiles, including metadata, if developed will be provided to the Forst Service.⁴

SCHEDULE

Step 1 – Gather Information/Mapping	May - July 2027
Step 2 – Field Evaluation	July - September 2027
Reporting	October - December 2027

REFERENCES

- United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service (Forest Service). 1974. National Forest Landscape Management. The Visual Management System, Volume 2. Agriculture Handbook. 462. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service.
- _____. 1991. Stanislaus National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. Department of Agriculture, Sonora, California. October 1991.
- _____. 2017. Stanislaus National Forest, Forest Plan Direction. Department of Agriculture, Sonora, California. March 2017.

⁴ In addition to the details provided in this section, reporting will also follow the "Concepts and Practices Applicable to All Relicensing Studies" developed by CCWD.

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