



## Salmon runs, dam debated in hydropower relicensing bid

By [Ben van der Meer/Appeal-Democrat](#)

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The long, winding river that is the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's relicensing for hydropower on the Yuba River began to flow Wednesday, but there are already metaphorical rocks in the waterway to slow it down.

With two scoping meetings laying out the process at the Yuba County Government Center, a group of organizations concerned about salmon runs said the Yuba County Water Agency should be as well.

"The licensee has split up the watershed in terms of fish passage," said Chris Shutes, FERC projects director with the California Sportfishing Protection Alliance.

Shutes criticized the Yuba County Water Agency for leaving Lake Englebright and the Englebright Dam out of its potential study topics on salmon by saying Englebright is the responsibility of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

"We think it's time to stop that," Shutes said, joining fishing, environmental and federal agencies who called for a comprehensive study of restoring Chinook and steelhead salmon river runs to be part of relicensing.

At the evening meeting for the public to comment, many who did were environmentalists who repeated the concerns about including Englebright and restoring salmon runs.

One speaker, Nevada County resident Bill Jacobson, said there was a spiritual aspect to bringing back robust salmon populations.

"When the salmon left, a lot of life left," said Jacobson, who works with Native American tribes on water issues. "The beaver, the otter, the osprey, they all left.

"This is a chance to reinvigorate this issue," he said.

Scott Robertson, who runs the Emerald Cove Marina at Bullards Bar Reservoir with his brother, said he would like to see a slight adjustment in consideration of recreational uses, with larger boats and houseboats allowed.

Wednesday's earlier scoping meeting, after FERC and YCWA officials with FERC explained the process and timeline for relicensing, was for groups like Shutes' and the National Marine Fisheries Service to suggest topics to study along the way.

YCWA listed 41 study proposals in its pre-application document, a precursor to a formal filing for relicensing, which won't come until 2014.

The studies, reports, comments and hearings will occupy the next few years of the process, with a final decision by the commission in 2015.

Alan Mitchnick, a FERC project coordinator, said he would caution those pushing for more studies to give good rationale for doing so.

"A lot of things you bring up are going to make people at the commission very nervous," he said, because studying salmon runs involves a broader scope than just hydroelectric generation and dams, for example.

"I just ask that you provide in your comments a real clear reason why those issues should be part of the relicensing study."

YCWA's current license, granted in 1966 to generate hydroelectricity from water out of Bullards Bar on the north fork of the Yuba River, expires in 2016.

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