

Mokelumne River Protection Alliance

News Release

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California Democratic Party Supports Protecting the Mokelumne River

On Sunday, July 19, the California Democratic Party joined conservation advocates, businesses and thousands of Californians from all walks of life in supporting National Wild and Scenic River designation for the Mokelumne River and opposing the expansion of Pardee Reservoir. The Mokelumne River flows from the high Sierra to the Delta and provides 90 percent of the water for the East Bay Municipal Utility District's 1.3 million customers.

As described in the resolution adopted by the Democrats' Executive Board on Sunday, the Mokelumne River is "a valuable part of California's natural and human heritage, noted for its high water quality; important wildlife and fish habitat; unique and numerous American Indian sites dating back thousands of years; important historical sites from the Gold Rush, hard-rock mining, and early hydroelectric development eras; outstanding family, fishing, and whitewater boating recreational opportunities; and great scenic beauty."

"While Sierra foothill Democrats brought this resolution to the party's attention, it's clearly an issue that concerns the whole state," said Tillman Sherman, Chairman of the Calaveras County Democratic Central Committee. "Protecting the Mokelumne River is important not only for our local communities, but also for the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and the state's threatened salmon and steelhead fisheries. And it can help move the East Bay to more sustainable, long-term water supplies."

The Democratic Party resolution supports National Wild and Scenic River designation from just below Salt Springs Dam on the North Fork Mokelumne to the backwaters of Pardee Reservoir, covering about 37 river miles. The designation, which requires an act of Congress, would protect the designated reaches from new dams, diversions and inundation by reservoir expansion. The latter is especially important because of the East Bay Municipal Utility District's recent proposal to build a new, 400-foot dam on the Mokelumne, which would expand Pardee Reservoir and flood about three miles of the river.

The Democrats' resolution opposes that expansion and encourages EBMUD to employ less-destructive means of meeting its future water supply needs.

"California's majority party has officially recognized what we've long known: the Mokelumne River has nothing left to give," remarked Chris Shutes, FERC Projects Director of the California Sportfishing Protection Alliance. "Wild and scenic status should be implemented as soon as possible, and EBMUD should reconsider its water supply assumptions and options."

In opposing the reservoir expansion, the California Democratic Party joins foothill local governments, conservation and recreation organizations, historical preservation groups, tribal members, and countless individuals who have strongly opposed the EBMUD plan.

“Protecting the Mokelumne River isn’t a partisan issue,” said Chris Wright, Foothill Conservancy executive director. “The river belongs to everyone, and it has broad support from people of all political persuasions. But we’re grateful to the Democrats for weighing in on this important issue, and we’re happy to add them to the growing Mokelumne supporter list.”

According to the Democrats’ resolution, “The Mokelumne provides water and power to millions of Californians for residential, commercial, industrial, and agricultural use through its existing system of dams, reservoirs and diversions, as well as economic benefits to foothill economies from tourism and recreation.”

The resolution continues, “To balance the extensive water and hydroelectric development on the Mokelumne River requires protecting its remaining free-flowing sections in perpetuity for their significant and unique social, natural, and economic value.”

For more information on the effort to protect the Mokelumne and stop the expansion of Pardee Reservoir, contact Chris Wright of the Foothill Conservancy at 209-295-4900, Steve Evans of Friends of the River at 916-442-3155, or Chris Shutes of the California Sportfishing Protection Alliance at 510-421-2405.

The Mokelumne River Protection Alliance is working to protect the Mokelumne River, prevent the expansion of Pardee Reservoir, and encourage the East Bay Municipal Utility District to adopt 21st century water-supply solutions. It is spearheaded by American Whitewater, California Sportfishing Protection Alliance, Environmental Water Caucus, Foothill Conservancy, and Friends of the River, in cooperation with Trout Unlimited, CalTrout, the Sierra Club San Francisco Bay Chapter and numerous other conservation organizations. To volunteer to help with its efforts, contact Tim Robertson at tim@savethemoke.com or 510-712-8620.