

**STUDY REPORT RR-02
WHITEWATER BOATING TAKE-OUT
IMPROVEMENT FEASIBILITY**

ATTACHMENT B

**WHITEWATER BOATING TAKE-OUT FEASIBILITY
STUDY FOCUS GROUP MEETING SUMMARY**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section No.	Description	Page No.
1.0	EXISTING TAKE-OUT SITUATION	1-1
1.1	Types of User Groups	1-1
1.2	How the Take-Out is Currently Used	1-1
1.3	Challenges at Ward’s Ferry Bridge Take-Out	1-1
	1.3.1 Difficult Terrain	1-1
	1.3.2 User Conflicts at Take-Out Sites	1-2
	1.3.3 Lawlessness.....	1-2
	1.3.4 Traffic Congestion	1-3
	1.3.5 Conflict with Motorized Boaters	1-4
1.4	Perception of User Group Disparity	1-4
2.0	ALTERNATIVES DISCUSSED	2-1
2.1	Take-Out at Moccasin Point Recreation Area	2-1
2.2	Take-Out at Ward’s Ferry Bridge	2-1
	2.2.1 Boat Ramp(s) to Low Water	2-1
	2.2.2 Widening the Ward’s Ferry Bridge.....	2-2
	2.2.3 Constructing a Dedicated Boater Crane Platform.....	2-2
2.3	Alternatives at New Locations.....	2-3
	2.3.1 Deer Creek Road.....	2-3
	2.3.2 Mohican Mine Road	2-3
	2.3.3 Land Swap for New Take-Out.....	2-3
2.4	Ranking the Alternatives.....	2-4
3.0	DPRA’S THOUGHTS ON THE TAKE-OUT	3-1
4.0	FINAL THOUGHTS	4-1

Whitewater Boating Take-Out Improvement Feasibility Study

Focus Group with Whitewater Boating Outfitters and River Boaters

Location: Hetch-Hetchy Water and Power, Moccasin, CA

Date: April 17, 2012

Time: 2:30-4:30 pm

Attendees

- Tom McDonnell – Sierra Mac River Trips
- Darrel Roman – Tuolumne River Shuttles
- Jeff Horn – BLM
- Marty McDonnell – Sierra
- Steve Bowes – National Park Service
- Dusty Vaughn – USDA Forest Service
- Vern Shumway – USDA Forest Service
- Dave Jigour – Don Pedro Recreation Agency
- Cooper Freeman – White Water Voyages
- Bob Ferguson – Zehpyr Whitewater
- James Rodger – OARS
- Jody Rowlands – OARS
- Carol Russell – Don Pedro Recreation Agency
- Bob Hackamack – Retired Canoeist/Tuolumne River Trust
- Jean Hackamack – “Along for the ride...”
- Steve Welch – ARTA River Trips
- Adam Mauerkiewicz – Hetch Hetchy
- Kelly Bricker, HDR
- Matt Paquette, HDR
- Jeremy Schultz, HDR

The following is a summary of comments and discussion at a meeting conducted per the Whitewater Boating Take-Out Improvement Feasibility Study Plan as approved in FERC’s Study Plan Determination issued December 22, 2011.

The purpose of the meeting was to elicit knowledge on use of the Ward’s Ferry Bridge take-out site from guides and boaters familiar with the Tuolumne River and take-out site. The meeting results will be used to understand the existing site, potential improvements, and alternative sites.

1.0 EXISTING TAKE-OUT SITUATION

1.1 Types of User Groups

The Ward's Ferry Access is used by 1) commercial whitewater boaters; 2) private whitewater boaters; and 3) general day use recreationists who picnic, fish, and occasionally launch a canoe/flat-water kayak in the reservoir.

1.2 How the Take-Out is Currently Used

Commercial boaters typically use one side of the river (river left) and the private boaters will use the other side (river right). The old, stone bridge abutments just upstream of the concrete bridge are currently the main point of access. The lay-down areas and construction access routes created during construction of the existing bridge are used as a walking path to get down water level at a range of elevations. At high pool, the old bridge abutments are under water. As the pool drops below the bridge abutments, various kinds of user-created trails go up the bridge abutments, and are used for carrying equipment. The commercial outfitters park truck-mounted cranes on Ward's Ferry Bridge to lift their gear up to the bridge.

According to the focus group participants, the trails below the high water elevation are considered less than adequate and the Outfitters worry about a twisted ankle by guests and staff; moving heavy equipment up the trail; and even users slipping off the trail carrying boats.

Presently, the commercial boaters use trucks with cranes on them. We pull the boats out of the reservoir and load our trucks. This has issues, using the bridge as a crane platform. And the county and the California Highway Patrol and other authorities have said 'well, until there's a better solution, we're going to look the other way.' It's not really legitimate in some ways what we're doing, but it's the best alternative.¹

Overall, river right receives more use due to it being a slightly shorter trail, less of an incline, and clear access to the Ward's Ferry road (i.e., no toilet blocking the trail). The trail on river right needs work, especially below the elevation of the top of the old bridge pilings.

It's just a gnarly little walk. It doesn't really work to carry equipment up it.

Several people have fallen into the reservoir off the old Ward's Ferry road because you're holding a big wide boat. The guys on the left sort of drop into the canyon.

1.3 Challenges at Ward's Ferry Bridge Take-Out

1.3.1 Difficult Terrain

The terrain at Ward's Ferry presents some challenges depending on water level. These include rock/boulder fields, eroding trail, incline to the road, limited space/access on the road, traffic, the

¹ Italicized indented text in this summary present more or less direct quotes from focus group participants.

restroom blocks the access on river left, and traffic and operational concerns when using a boom truck.

I would say that the risk of harm to my employees or my clients is greatest from the time they step off the boat to the time they step on the bus to leave Ward's Ferry. That area is very dangerous with sliding rock, people up above dropping rocks down on you down below, and just carrying equipment on steep slopes with no horizontal trail is a prime [situation] for workmen's comp claims or for people spraining ankles. This is a very dangerous place. The take-out is way more dangerous than the rapids.

There was some concern over the concrete piling used to block traffic going down the trail on river right. Some said the trail eroded over the years because of the concrete blocks.

When they put that block in, all the water that comes off the bridge hits that and careens off into the reservoir, but as it does, it cuts all this soil away. The original road bed is shrinking.

1.3.2 User Conflicts at Take-Out Sites

There appears to be some user conflict at the take-out. Part of the issue is limited access to the water surface at various elevations. Another aspect is limited parking on Ward's Ferry Road, with vehicles often blocking the areas where boaters must move rafts on to trailers, etc. One user described a typical situation at take-out:

We did a 2 day trip, 16 of us, 4 boats, took out on river right. The reservoir level was below the bridge abutments so you actually pass the bridge abutments and then there's a switchback that goes up to the old Ward's Ferry road. There were 3 fishermen right at the bottom of the trail where it hits the reservoir with their fishing rods in the water and they didn't really want to move their fishing rods so we ended up sort of scaling the reservoir cliff side up. They eventually did move after we had made a few trips and they recognized somebody that was on our trip who they knew. We chose the river right side, because the river left side is blocked by the vault toilet and it's really hard and it gets really narrow because the toilet is close to the cliff and it's hard to get boats through there. So that's why the right side is usually the preferable side for carrying rafts up.

1.3.3 Lawlessness

Another aspect of user conflict is the continual lawlessness at the bridge. The lawlessness is impacting use at Ward's Ferry. Participants said law enforcement typically does not patrol this area due primarily to the lack of radio communication in the canyon. Further, most non-boaters know this and recognize that the area has limited law enforcement, which leads to unsafe conditions and rampant vandalism (painting on the bridge and restroom, breaking into vehicles, and general vandalism).

[Years ago...] there were a fair amount of private boaters who did overnight trips and I think the combination of the take-out getting worse and the security going completely

down, I mean it's not even safe to leave your stuff there unattended sometimes. And I think that has a big impact because as a private entity, there isn't the infrastructure for you to get your car down there and if you park it you're playing with fire. Which is unfortunate, this is one of the nicest rivers in the state if not the nation.

That's one of the things that disturbs me is that we are sort of accepting the fact that this is just a lawless area and we just can't do anything about it. Well you can do things about it. You can contract for a deputy. And you pay them enough money and get some communication down there and things would change.

Don Pedro project could station an officer down there since it is in the project as a public service person. And that would help a lot of things, but it would certainly make it easier for the rafters to take-out because the person could direct traffic; and as an official his presence would be felt by everybody and they'd be more courteous. And he could open the toilet to anybody while he's there. That's one little thing that could be done right away to help.

If you're going to put facilities in there, it's going to have to be secure. And it isn't now. And it would be crazy to leave your car there overnight. It wouldn't be there when you got back. Someone drilled into our gas tank and when we got a mile up it poured out on the ground. It's a problem. I don't know if this is the venue, but that's a law enforcement issue. That could be pretty easily solved if it's a communications issue. Put in a temporary repeater; those are pretty easy to come by.

To address security, the Forest Service River Rangers go down every week during the summer time. But leaving your vehicle there for any length of time is not advisable because it can be vandalized. That's another challenge with security. And the Forest Service River Rangers have the authority to write citations on the upper stretches of the river but not a Ward's Ferry because it's not Forest Service land. They deal with users conflicts with private boaters or with the fishermen or picnickers or whoever is blocking the take-out. They try and get them to move; that's an ongoing issue that Forest Service river rangers to help with.

1.3.4 Traffic Congestion

There is also considerable concern regarding traffic at the bridge.

I would say that the likelihood of one of my clients or guides being killed by a car on Ward's Ferry Bridge far exceeds anything else that we do.

In summary, the lack of a designated take-out area or assigned area for boaters presents issues among boaters and other shoreline users, particularly related to vehicles. For example, as one boater explained:

You have the spots were the vehicles are parked, but this year even the private trips are bringing the rafts and equipment up onto the road because there's no space on either

side to park or a designated loading area. The commercial users know to keep the road open, but somebody there for the first time, they just explode into the space and they don't care whether somebody has to wait while they deflate their boat.

The turn-around radius: And sometimes, I drive the bus, and I need a pretty good turnaround and to tow the trailer, they have to go all the way, almost a mile, to turn their trailer around. But there is a place where I turn my bus, but a lot of times, fishermen park right in the area.

While improvements are needed for the reasons discussed at the meeting, they could result in more constraints on use if not carefully considered:

Currently we can have 3 boom trucks and a couple private trips all taking out at one time. So if there is a ramp or access that goes down, it needs to be sized big enough that you can have 2 or 3, I don't know what that size is, but something to think about.

1.3.5 Conflict with Motorized Boaters

At present, motorized boaters can present a hazard and nuisance to whitewater boaters taking out at the bridge, primarily due to high speeds and lack of etiquette.

You also have to realize we're interfacing with reservoir users - jetskis and houseboats. It's not necessarily a big problem, but if you have your boat tied up to the side and the guy speeds by, and your boat goes up and down, the sharp rocks slash through the boat; this has been kind of a common problem for us when we're trying to take-out there.

One option is to designate this arm of the reservoir as non-motorized or motorized by with a speed limit by installing buoys at the bridge. Don Pedro Recreation Agency (DPRA) noted that this approach may impact the outfitters and boaters who choose to pull the rafts and kayaks behind a motorized boat to Moccasin Point Recreation Area.

DPRA noted that the current county code requires a 5-mph speed limit within 200 yards of the Ward's Ferry Bridge, but it is not marked/signed and not enforced/patrolled. DPRA said painting this speed limit on the bridge pilings is an option (which would require county approval), but DPRA needs another high water year to access and work on the pilings above the high water line. DPRA can get permission from the county to actually stencil signs on the bridge abutments or the pilings.

1.4 Perception of User Group Disparity

Respondents noted some disparity between facilities provided for motorized craft and those provided for non-motorized craft.

There's a disparity between the public facilities that are at the DPRA recreation sites on the reservoir and the facilities for the whitewater boaters. I know how it happened, because whitewater boating wasn't very prevalent when the project was built. There's

this disparity how one group of people of treated and the other group. So I think I'd focus on some improvement in how the whitewater boaters are treated. Patrols could be there at least in the day time to talk to the fishermen so that the conflicts don't come up; and there could be a secure parking area for private boaters who want to leave cars overnight.

2.0 ALTERNATIVES DISCUSSED

2.1 Take-Out at Moccasin Point Recreation Area

The Forest Service takes-out at Moccasin Point Recreation Area from time to time, but that has its own logistics problems. Once you pass the Ward's Ferry Bridge, you are in flat water and it is a long way to anything. The take-out time can be too long for commercial and most likely most private boaters—at 1.5 hours.

One positive is that DPRA does a great job of removing the logs that drift down the river; the route to Moccasin Point is clear for boating.

2.2 Take-Out at Ward's Ferry Bridge

2.2.1 Boat Ramp(s) to Low Water

Participants said that a ramp (preferably concrete but at least an improved/reinforced surface) to the water's edge at low water would be the best alternative. At a minimum, at least one side of the river should have a concrete ramp. However, the participants noted that given the multiple uses of this site and the crowding that can occur with multiple commercial outfitters taking out at the same time and/or private boaters taking out, the ideal scenario would include a concrete ramp to low water on both river left and river right. Several participants stated that the Graves Creek site on the Rogue River in Oregon is a good example (see attached photographs). Participants also said the pedestrian trails would need improvement. Many participants said that the ramp could be a back-down style designated as a non-motorized ramp with commercial and private boater access via a key permit system. Vehicle access needs to be limited to non-motorized boat take-out to prevent the site from being overwhelmed by anglers and other shoreline users.

So what about a ramp that was only open by permit to rafters or private rafters who got a permit and got a key to a padlock.

One of the challenges of building a boat ramp upstream from Ward's Ferry when we looked at this before, was cutting into the bank rather than building a bridge down to the water. And the landscape architects and engineers that looked at that; both sides felt that retaining walls were astronomical. That is was conceivable, but that is was somewhat a big stumbling block.

I've seen in Colorado's boat ramps in similar situations that were amazing; full on 4 lane bridge freeway type construction that goes right down into the water. And I think if you were to do something like that at Ward's Ferry, you know that's a big construction thing, but you need to have a boat ramp that goes down to the water's edge so the person can drive their vehicles right to the water, that's what needs to happen at Ward's Ferry. Some sort of access, probably geographically upstream, going upstream from the bridge, is the most reasonable approach. Both sides would be ideal.

If you can do it on Grave's Creek on the Rogue River, you can certainly do it at Ward's Ferry. It's a very similar canyon, very steep, very similar to this in terms of scale and distance from the road, distance from the bridge, all those things. So, I mean if it's done there, you can certainly do it here. That being said is that the best site for it. I don't know.

Grave's Creek is actually a put in, southern Oregon; it's the start of a wild and scenic boundary. The road turns off and they have a beautiful boat put in, it's very functional. It's not super big, it just goes down a hill, it has a little turnaround, a bathroom you know. A different scenario in terms of raising of the river, but that river gets up there to the 100,000 cfs range often so it would inundate that parking lot and it seems to have been fine.

In my world, in my ideal eco-friendly world, my vision for Ward's Ferry is...and I'm looking 50 years ahead: no motorized craft upstream of the bridge, 2 lane road and access all the way into the reservoir on whichever side of the road that you could drive right to the reservoir's edge, meaning that but no further so that you wouldn't be able to back a trailer in or launch a motorized boat. And there's parking up at bridge level for day use, but I can't imagine it being safe over night ever.

2.2.2 Widening the Ward's Ferry Bridge

Another suggestion was to widen the bridge, primarily to increase the parking opportunities at the site, which are otherwise greatly limited by the terrain (steep canyon walls near the river's edge).

Widening the bridge itself, I'm not sure if that's feasible. I know that at Don Pedro they left a little bit of concrete on the side, so at some point down the road I know they were planning on putting a whole other landing in here. But if the Ward's Ferry Bridge were feasible to be widened, that would be a real big improvement.

2.2.3 Constructing a Dedicated Boater Crane Platform

Another idea presented was to look into a permanent, dedicated crane platform, but most participants indicated this would not be the preferred method. However, if cost was prohibitive with the other more preferred options, then participants indicated this could be a workable, but less desirable option. Participants indicate some challenges with this option, as follows.

If other options are not feasible, it might be worth it to build a crane platform...you know it's something I wouldn't do, but that could be a solution to the problem...that might be more economically feasible than building a lane all the way down to the water and less environmental impact.

Private boaters never really have access to the boom truck and winch. And that might be something that we could consider spelling out how to coordinate and license – how the private boaters could use a winch from the bridge.

2.3 Alternatives at New Locations

2.3.1 Deer Creek Road

Deer Creek downstream of Ward's Ferry was another area mentioned as a potential site. This site would require pioneering a road longer than the Ward's Ferry site and would still require roughly 0.25-mile paddle below Ward's Ferry on flat-water.

Right across from Deer Creek there's actually a trail that goes down that people use to get firewood. It goes all the way to the water. That was talked about being the best new access, but then that takes you farther downstream of Ward's Ferry bridge and has the same issues.

Just downstream of where Deer Creek comes out on the north side of the river.

It's a pretty good walking grade to walk into. It's not as steep.

You start up a little higher because the road winds, but for a long time they thought of it as the preferred place. But if you were to build a cement road that went upstream, you'd have more feasible, cheaper, and likely to use. It takes you to the top of the ridge rather than a couple hundred yards.

2.3.2 Mohican Mine Road

Another new location suggested was the Mohican Mine Road, located approximately 3 miles upstream of the Ward's Ferry location. The existing road is a very rough, four-wheel drive road that would require major improvements to make it passable, particularly for outfitter vehicles (buses and vans with trailers). Participants indicated the numerous problems exist with this option, including the loss of river miles (3 mi) and quality whitewater; archeological sites in the area; private land.

2.3.3 Land Swap for New Take-Out

A suggestion was to look at access and other potential road developments that may or may not be on private property, with the idea the Forest Service or BLM could facilitate a land swap.

I think along those lines though, that's thinking outside of the box and is there another way, is there a road that is close that we could pioneer a road into a site that doesn't have issues of steep canyon walls. There's some Federal land down that butts up against the reservoir, so there are opportunities potentially and that is something I think we really need to study because if we can do flat roads, that might balance out cost wise. If there is currently federal land or there is an opportunity for swapping something that is beneficial to the project, then that is something we could look at, you know to accommodate a take-out or put in.

2.4 Ranking the Alternatives

The preferred alternative was a gated concrete ramp for access at all water levels, with access for multiple user types on both sides of the river identified as ideal. The next preferred alternative substituted the highly developed concrete material for more basic/rudimentary improvements to the existing road (grading/reinforcing the canyon walls) combined with the other access improvements (restroom relocation and parking expansion).

Regardless of the option chosen for improving direct access to low water, participants expressed strong support for the following improvements: 1) relocating the restroom, 2) providing additional parking opportunities; and 3) trail improvements to the river.

Finally, participants emphasized the need for increased law enforcement presence at this location to protect and preserve any improved facilities and provide a safe environment, especially after investments are made in site improvements.

3.0 DPRA'S THOUGHTS ON THE TAKE-OUT

DPRA representatives offered the following:

There may be a simple solution: Move the restroom, so it does not occupy the turnout, gating the road on river left, building a road down to the high water mark with a switchback, and a ramp to low water. This would require building up the road with gravel and rip-rap and rock wall.

4.0 FINAL THOUGHTS

Participants identified the overall importance of the Tuolumne River as a whitewater resource and its premier status not only in the state of California, but in the United States as well.

One of the things that I want to stress, I mean this is the gem in terms of whitewater rivers in our state. It's off the charts in terms of importance, and yet it has the crappiest take-out that there is. So that needs to change, it really does.

Respondents also said “something” rather than “nothing” needs to occur in the way of improvements to the take-out situation.

Also, we've been talking a lot about the ideal scenario, but I hope you are going to look at different grades of what we can do. Because you know cost is going to come up, and if all we look at is the ideal scenario and its going to cost a lot, then you need to have something else to look at whether it's just an improved trail, or surface hardening to just make the haul out easier from basically cheapest solution to a dream solution.

Respondents were in agreement overall as to the challenges and opportunities for an improved take-out at Ward's Ferry Bridge.

And for all of the challenges that we've identified, there is very little dissention in the room. I mean I think you're working...it's not like he wants blue and I want red, so I think that's a positive thing that we all...and the other thing is that anything you do is going to be an improvement.