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NCPA Community Unites to Repair Damage from the Valley Fire, Restores Operation of the Lake County Treated Wastewater Pipeline to the Geysers

(Roseville, Calif.) – One of California’s most valuable renewable energy resources—the geothermal steamfields at the Geysers—has experienced major infrastructure damage due to the Valley Fire, which started on September 12th and burned over 76,000 acres in Lake, Napa, and Sonoma Counties. For the Northern California Power Agency (NCPA), the catastrophic fire shutdown geothermal operations for several days. Through a well-orchestrated collaborative effort, NCPA’s member utilities—including various local governments throughout Northern and Central California—provided support to help bring NCPA’s operations back online. This work included restoring the infrastructure that supports the Southeast Geysers Effluent Pipeline, which is crucial to the geothermal operations at the Geysers as well as the effluent disposal program in Lake County.

The Southeast Geysers Effluent Pipeline is a 50-mile pipeline that collects effluent from ten Lake County communities for injection into the Geysers’ steamfields operated by NCPA and Calpine Corporation. NCPA and Calpine jointly operate and maintain three Bear Canyon Pump stations that are necessary to pump the effluent to the Geysers. The Valley Fire destroyed the power line system to those Bear Canyon Pump Stations. Normally, Calpine maintains the pipeline’s power lines; however, due to the extensive damage to Calpine’s geothermal facilities, NCPA took the lead to restore the power.

“The fire seriously damaged our infrastructure, but we did not have direct damage to our facilities the way Calpine did,” said NCPA general manager Randy Howard. “In fact, on September 16th, we were able to restart our power plants thanks to the help of the Plumas-Sierra Rural Electric Cooperative, who installed satellite communications that allowed coordinated operations with the California Independent System Operator.”

NCPA’s work to restore the effluent pipeline system started on September 16th, while the Valley Fire was still spreading. The initial work involved the City of Healdsburg—an NCPA member utility—assessing the damage, ordering materials, and planning and coordinating with other NCPA member utilities to do the repair work. Along with Healdsburg, NCPA member utilities Palo Alto, Santa Clara, Redding, Lodi, and

Roseville, as well as the Truckee-Donner Public Utility District, sent fully equipped line crews to reset over 50 damaged power poles and string new power lines. Due to this collective effort, the Southeast Geysers Effluent Pipeline was placed back in service ahead of schedule on September 30th.

In addition to the benefits the pipeline provides the Geysers, Lake County residents also rely on it for effluent disposal. Restoring the effluent pipeline was a major priority for Lake County, as the county only had limited storage available for its treated sewer wastewater.

For NCPA, the Valley Fire demonstrates the need for new policies that make forests more fire resilient. “We are having more of these large, devastating wildfires every year,” said Randy Howard. “In addition to the effect these fires have on people’s lives and important infrastructure, they are also releasing massive amounts of greenhouse gases, which are frustrating our efforts to reduce emissions in the state. There is an urgent need to look at policy reforms in this area.”

During NCPA’s annual meeting this week, a session was dedicated to discussing potential disasters related to climate change, such as the fire. “The preparation and response to impacts such as those experienced by the Valley Fire require closer cooperation and mutual aid between the relevant entities,” said Howard.

About NCPA: Headquartered in Roseville, California, the Northern California Power Agency is a not-for-profit joint powers agency that represents and helps meet the power supply needs for 650,000 customers who reside in our 15 member communities and districts in Northern and Central California. The organization and its members have a long-standing commitment to provide California residents with an electricity supply that is reliable, affordable, and socially and environmentally responsible, and have a long tradition of investment in conservation projects. NCPA owns and manages a 700 MW portfolio of hydropower, geothermal and natural gas projects on behalf of its members.