

Cow Creek Planning Unit

All recommended measures must be coordinated with the decommissioning process to avoid inconsistent or duplicative recommendations. When the decommissioning process is completed, the planning unit will need to be re-evaluated based on the outcome, in close coordination with community stakeholders and all interested parties.

Fish, Plant, and Wildlife Habitat

Potential Measure:

- *Conduct surveys of the planning unit to identify biological resources and enable their protection.*

The planning unit is minimally associated with a FERC Project and likely has not been surveyed or studied, except possibly for previous timber harvests, the last of which was potentially 30 years ago. Wetlands, meadows, marsh, and seeps that occur or may occur within the planning unit suggest there could be special status species present. Therefore, the Stewardship Council recommends conducting surveys of the planning unit to identify biological resources and enable their protection. Survey efforts should be coordinated with any similar efforts by the Cow Creek Watershed Management Group. If special status species are found and protection and/or enhancement measures appear to be needed or feasible, a wildlife and habitat management plan could be developed as appropriate.

Potential Measure:

- *Develop a noxious weed management plan for the planning unit.*

It is unknown to what extent noxious weed infestations occur within the planning unit, one of the grazing lessees had attempted to control known infestations when they became apparent. Therefore, the Stewardship Council recommends developing a noxious weed management plan for the planning unit. Development of the noxious weed management plan should be coordinated with existing PG&E noxious weed efforts, and the rangeland, fuels, and forest management plans.

Open Space

Potential Measure:

- *Apply permanent conservation easements to ensure a higher level of open space protection.*

The Stewardship Council recommends preserving open space values through permanent conservation easements. Conservation easements would describe all prohibited uses to maintain open space values, including the level of uses allowed. Recommendations do not include development of any new sites and are therefore not expected to decrease the scenic quality of the viewsheds.

Outdoor Recreation

Potential Measure:

- *Monitor recreation use within the planning unit.*

Current recreation use is probably low due to limited access, lack of activities available, short recreation season (due to weather), and presence of several well-known recreation areas close by. Local residents are likely the primary visitors to the planning unit as it is not a recreation destination. Due to nearby recreation areas such as Lassen National Forest, Thousand Lakes Wilderness, and LaTour State Forest, development of extensive recreation facilities within the planning unit is not warranted. The Whitmore area has become more developed, and there are several proposals for large, rural residential developments in the area. Therefore, local resident use of the planning unit may increase as more people move to the area. The Stewardship Council recommends monitoring recreation use within the planning unit to identify any problems or impacts from recreation and the need for additional management of recreation use. If identified as needed based on monitoring, a recreation management plan would be developed. If additional facilities or management is needed, efforts should be coordinated with the grazing lessees and management of forest and agricultural resources.

Sustainable Forestry

Potential Measure:

- *Develop a fuels management plan for the planning unit to ensure long-term forest health and reduce fuel loading and fire hazard.*

Reducing fire risk is important in this planning unit due to the proximity of the planning unit to the community of Whitmore and numerous housing developments, as well as the presence of fire-prone vegetation throughout the planning unit. There have been many fires within the Whitmore area, including a recent fire that burned many acres just east of the community. There is currently no plan for the management of fuels on planning unit lands, and fuels have likely built up, though there has been an active PG&E brush conversion project since 2003 to remove overmature decadent brush fields and reduce these hazardous fuels. Therefore, the Stewardship Council recommends developing a fuels management plan for the planning unit to ensure long-term forest health and reduce fuel loading and fire hazard. The plan should include development of defensible space along the edge of the planning unit near housing areas to reduce fire risk in the wildland urban interface area. Development of the plan should be coordinated with any related or adjacent fuel reduction projects by the community of Whitmore, CDF, or Cow Creek Watershed Management Group. Development of the fuels management plan should also be coordinated with the noxious weed, rangeland, and forest management plans.

Potential Measure:

- *Develop a fire management and response plan for the planning unit to ensure fire preparedness.*

The Stewardship Council also recommends developing a fire management and response plan for planning unit lands to ensure fire preparedness and guide fire fighting and reporting methods and responsibility. It is important for residents of adjacent housing developments and the grazing lessees to have fire reporting protocols and ways to escape the area if there is a fire. There may be a potential access problem for residents of Mill Creek Estates as the only road access is

through the planning unit from the north; there is no road access to the south. Development of this plan should be coordinated with any related efforts by the community of Whitmore, CDF, or Cow Creek Watershed Management Group.

Potential Measures:

- *Evaluate existing timber inventory data and supplement as appropriate.*
- *Develop a forest management plan for the planning unit to promote natural forest development and structural and physical diversity in forests for long-term ecological, economic, social, and cultural benefits.*

The Timber Management Unit (TMU) that covers most of the planning unit is currently managed under a Sustainable Timber Management prescription. The planning unit is in large part sparsely forested and contains little valuable timber such as ponderosa pine or incense-cedar; however, there are currently efforts to enhance timber production, primarily of ponderosa pine, by clearing brush and planting trees to create plantations of harvestable timber. Despite these efforts, there is no overall documented cohesive, coordinated vision for forest and forage management within the planning unit. To enhance sustainable forestry management, the Stewardship Council recommends developing a forest management plan for the planning unit through the evaluation of existing forest inventory data and supplemental information, when appropriate. In addition to supporting natural forest development, the forest management plan would promote holistic watershed management, supporting the enhancement of other BPVs over the long term. Development of the forest management plan should be coordinated with the noxious weed and fuels management plans, as well as the rangeland management plan as development of forest resources both affects and is affected by agricultural use.

In areas where timber extraction is consistent with the forest management plan, timber harvesting techniques would be promoted that maintain mosaics of forest stands of different age, size, and rotation period. In addition to utilizing PG&E's uneven-age selection harvest system, harvesting practices and a monitoring program would be included to protect watercourses and lakes and promote the restoration and conservation of natural forests. Post-harvest, a monitoring plan would be developed to ensure that forest management and the proposed harvesting schedule would be consistent with the forest management plan, promoting natural forest development in perpetuity.

Potential Measure:

- *Manage plantations to best mimic forests in the natural landscape.*

Currently, the planning unit contains over 200 acres of conifer plantations. The Stewardship Council recommends managing these plantations to best mimic forests in the natural landscape. The scale and layout of plantation blocks would be consistent with the patterns of forest stands found in the natural landscape. Trees would be selected that are suitable for the natural conditions of the site. Unless unsuitable based on regeneration potential, native species would be selected and exotic species used minimally and only when determined to present no adverse ecological impacts. Plantation management would be included as a component of the forest management plan.

Agricultural Uses

Potential Measure:

- *Update deteriorating fencing and evaluate the need for additional fencing.*

Some fencing within the planning unit is up to 100 years old and needs to be replaced. There may also be areas in need of fencing where it does not currently exist. Therefore, to enhance grazing management, the Stewardship Council recommends updating deteriorating fencing and evaluating the need for additional fencing. Improved fencing may also reduce unauthorized OHV use within the planning unit. Additional fencing needs would also be incorporated into the rangeland management plan.

Potential Measure:

- *Develop a baseline conditions report that describes current agricultural, physical, and overall biological conditions of the area, including current uses and state of improvement.*

Currently, there is no formal range management within the planning unit. Additionally, creeks and other wet areas are not fenced-off from grazing, and several months of grazing use could be impacting these more sensitive areas. It is likely that assessments of range and stream conditions have never been conducted. Therefore, the Stewardship Council recommends developing a baseline conditions report that describes current agricultural, physical, and overall biological conditions of the area, including current uses and state of improvement. This report would help determine appropriate grazing practices, regime, and management.

Potential Measure:

- *Develop a rangeland management plan for grazing use that includes goals and objectives and a monitoring and adaptive management strategy, and specifies grazing practices that address soil and water conservation, erosion control, pest management, nutrient management, vegetation management, and habitat protection.*

Once the recommended baseline conditions report is completed, the Stewardship Council recommends developing a rangeland management plan for grazing use that includes goals and objectives and a monitoring and adaptive management strategy, and specifies grazing practices that may address topics including soil and water conservation, erosion control, pest management, nutrient management, vegetation management, habitat protection, and cultural resources management. This plan would ensure that grazing use within the planning unit meets the Stewardship Council policy for agricultural uses on Watershed Lands. This plan would also identify any additional fencing needed within the planning unit, in conjunction with protection and enhancement of habitat. Development of the rangeland management plan should also be coordinated with the noxious weed, fuels, and forest management plans.

Potential Measure:

- *Evaluate the potential for educational facilities/programs to demonstrate and promote appropriate grazing and sustainable forestry practices.*

The Stewardship Council also recommends evaluating the potential for educational facilities and/or programs that could be accommodated at the planning unit to demonstrate and promote appropriate grazing and sustainable forestry practices. Restoration of natural forest function and

enhancement of grazing in the planning unit can be showcased at this planning unit not only to school-aged children from Whitmore, but to adjacent landowners who are interested in similar ideas and practices. Education on grazing and sustainable forestry practices and management could enhance visitors' perceptions and appreciation for working landscapes and their value to habitats and local economies. Identifying potential partners for education projects, access points, demonstration areas, and interactions with existing grazing use would be required. Potential educational facilities include signs, trails, staging areas, and test sites. Potential program topics include grazing practices, forest functions and identification of healthy forest functioning, and methods of restoring habitat. Evaluation of the potential for educational programs or facilities should be coordinated with the grazing lessees, community of Whitmore, CDF, Cattleman's Associations, and Cow Creek Watershed Management Group.

Preservation of Historic Values

Potential Measures:

- *Conduct surveys of the planning unit to identify cultural resources and enable their protection.*
- *Coordinate with Native American entities when conducting cultural resource measures.*

Cow Creek is minimally associated with a FERC Project and has likely not been surveyed for cultural resources, except potentially for previous timber harvests. Any surveys associated with previous harvests may not have been conducted to current standards. The area contains historic resources since there was at least one homestead in the area, remnants of which can still be found. To preserve these resources, the Stewardship Council recommends conducting surveys of the planning unit to identify cultural resources and enable their protection. Documentation of cultural sites should be coordinated with Native American entities.

Potential Measures:

- *Conduct an ethnographic study of the planning unit to identify traditional use areas.*
- *Coordinate with Native American entities when conducting cultural resource measures.*

In addition to surveying, the Stewardship Council recommends conducting an ethnographic (and ethnohistoric) study of the planning unit to identify traditional use areas. Such a study would document historical use of the planning unit and Native American use, if such information is available. As generations pass on, this information is difficult to obtain and valuable historical information may be lost. People within the Whitmore area likely still remember historical use of the planning unit, though Native American use of the planning unit may be difficult to document due to decimation of the Yana people that would have lived in the planning unit area. The study may also provide information that identifies additional cultural sites that surveys cannot or do not identify. The ethnographic study should be coordinated with Native American entities.

Potential Measures:

- *Develop a cultural resources management plan for the planning unit.*
- *Coordinate with Native American entities when conducting cultural resource measures.*

Once the recommended surveying and ethnographic study identify cultural sites and traditional use areas, the Stewardship Council recommends developing a cultural resources management plan for the planning unit to ensure that cultural resources are provided adequate protection in the

future. The plan would include appropriate measures for the identification, evaluation, and treatment of cultural resources (archaeological and historical) and traditional use areas. Treatment measures could include avoidance, specific protective measures (e.g., fencing), site monitoring, and methods to preserve, restore, or enhance cultural resource values through conservation easements, management agreements, or through public interpretation and education programs. Development of the cultural resources management plan should be coordinated with Native American entities.