

## Lake Almanor Planning Unit

### Outdoor Recreation

Recreation needs have been a major focus of the FERC relicensing process for the Upper North Fork Feather River (UNFFR) Project, and nearly all existing facilities and the most popular informal use areas are scheduled to receive enhancements. (When available, final License Conditions for the UNFFR Project would be incorporated into plans for this planning unit.) Therefore, the recommended recreation enhancement measures are generally intended to build upon actions proposed in the UNFFR Project License Application and Settlement Agreement, recognizing the opportunity to extend some proposed measures to further enhance the BPV of outdoor recreation in the planning unit. Key recommended recreation components include extension of an existing trail, evaluation of potential sites for enhancement of wildlife viewing opportunities, and increased public access to the Pacific Service Employees Association (PSEA) camp facility.

#### Potential Measure:

- *Extend the Lake Almanor Recreation Trail from its northern terminus to the Chester area.*

Area stakeholders have expressed an interest in a northward extension of the Lake Almanor Recreation Trail (LART) onto PG&E lands on the northwest and west shore, which would complement planned extensions of the trail on the southwest and southeast shores. The extension would begin at the existing trail terminus south of the Lake Almanor West residential community on USFS land, and would run north toward Chester on the narrow strip of PG&E land between the lake shore and Highway 89. Trail easements on USFS lands and on non-PG&E private lands near Lake Almanor West would be required to link the trail to the PG&E shoreline lands. The cooperation of these adjacent landowners would be sought to complete the extension; the UNFFR Project License Application included consideration of such coordination and cooperation among PG&E, USFS, and Almanor Recreation and Park District to facilitate the extension of the trail. Consideration of public safety would be particularly crucial where the trail would cross the primary access road into the Lake Almanor West development. In addition to easements, a bridge over the Chester flood control channel (also on USFS land) would be required to link the trail to PG&E lands on the northwest shore adjacent to Chester. Along the northwest shore, the trail could be routed through PG&E lands between the shoreline and First Avenue, with a potential terminus at the Stover Ranch site, where day use improvements and a shoreline trail are planned. Day use or trailhead facilities may also be possible on PG&E lands near the airport, within the context of the PG&E's UNFFR Recreation Resource Management Plan (RRMP), developed in consultation with USFS. The PG&E shoreline lands that the trail would cross are favorable for this use, with generally flat topography and open pine forest. Unpaved trails near the northwest shore, apparently created by unauthorized OHV use, could potentially be converted to bike and pedestrian use, after vehicles were excluded with barriers.

#### Potential Measure:

- *Evaluate potential sites for construction of a parking area and wildlife viewing platform in the vicinity of the causeway at the south edge of Last Chance Marsh.*

The elevated Highway 36 causeway crosses the southern edge of the Last Chance Marsh, providing outstanding opportunities for viewing birds on the marsh and on meadows on the northwest and southwest sides of the causeway. However, travelers who stop to observe the birds can only pull onto the shoulder of the road. The Stewardship Council recommends evaluating potential sites on or near the causeway for construction of a parking area and wildlife viewing platform. The evaluation would identify and compare sites that provide good viewing opportunities in a safe location where impacts on biological and cultural resources would be minimized. A desirable site would also provide visibility to protect the site from vandalism and other unauthorized use. Interpretive information focused on biological resources in the marsh area would enhance the site. An elevated walkway extending from a platform into a meadow or marsh may provide better viewing opportunities at some sites. Any measures recommended along the State Highway would need to be planned and carefully coordinated with the California Department of Transportation (CalTrans) to ensure safe conditions for vehicles entering and exiting the site. Any construction into marsh or meadow habitat would be coordinated with DFG and would need to be compatible with the wildlife habitat enhancement plan to be developed as part of the UNFFR Project Settlement Agreement. Disturbance of jurisdictional wetlands that may occur with construction of the recommended facility would require Federal and State permits.

**Potential Measure:**

- *Enhance public recreation access at the PSEA camp.*

The PSEA's Camp Almanor provides several cabins and associated facilities on the west shore of the lake for the use of their members (PG&E employees, retirees, and family members). As a result of the UNFFR Project Settlement Agreement, the PSEA beach adjacent to the camp was recently improved and placed under PG&E management for use by the general public as the Marvin Alexander Day Use Area. The Stewardship Council recommends enhancing public access to the PSEA camp.

**Fish, Plant, and Wildlife Habitat****Potential Measure:**

- *Expand the planned wildlife habitat enhancement plan to include evaluation of habitat needs for all of the Last Chance Marsh and the north shore, and implement protection and enhancement actions.*

Within the UNFFR Project Settlement Agreement, PG&E has agreed to prepare a wildlife habitat enhancement plan in consultation with Federal and State agencies. However, the plan is stipulated to address only shoreline lands between Last Chance Campground (at the north end of Last Chance Marsh) and the Chester flood control channel (i.e., the northwest shoreline of the reservoir). The importance of the Last Chance Marsh and north shoreline areas as habitat for rare plants (five have been identified in the marsh) and for wading birds and waterfowl justifies a more comprehensive approach to habitat protection and enhancement than may arise from FERC relicensing. The Stewardship Council recommends expanding the area benefiting from habitat protection and enhancements in conjunction with the above plan to include the entirety of the Last Chance Marsh and its eastern shoreline. Informal recreation use areas along the east shore of the marsh may have impacts on habitat, as could activities of hunters and others in the marsh. The primary elements of the future plan include fencing and vehicle exclusion measures; the Stewardship Council recommends expanding the plan to include habitat enhancements, such as

the installation of nesting platforms to increase waterfowl nesting success. Development of protection or enhancement measures would require collaboration with State and Federal wildlife management agencies, and would need to take into account factors such as fluctuating water levels and waterfowl hunting activity.

**Potential Measures:**

- *Conduct surveys of lands outside the FERC boundary to identify biological resources and enable their protection.*
- *Develop a companion to the planned wildlife habitat enhancement plan to address upland areas around Lake Almanor outside the FERC boundary, and implement protection and enhancement actions.*

The forested lands above the southeast shore of the reservoir (generally east of Highway 147 and the rail corridor) and on either side of the mouth of Bailey Creek are among the relatively limited lands owned by PG&E above the 4,500-foot high water elevation of the lake and are deserving of protection and enhancement of their habitat values. Some of these lands are near bald eagle nesting territories and are likely used as nesting or roosting sites by osprey. The lands are outside the FERC boundary and so have not been surveyed as part of relicensing, nor will they be addressed in the forthcoming wildlife habitat enhancement plan. Therefore, the Stewardship Council recommends development of a companion to the planned wildlife habitat enhancement plan to assess habitat values and protection and enhancement opportunities on these parcels, as well as implementation of measures to meet identified wildlife management goals and objectives. Biological resource surveys would be conducted on lands not included in relicensing studies. The plan would include a monitoring component to assess the success of protection and enhancement measures.

**Potential Measure:**

- *Develop a noxious weed management plan for lands outside the FERC boundary.*

The USFS has submitted to FERC a License Condition for the UNFFR Project requiring an Invasive Weed Management Plan. FERC states in the Final EIS for the UNFFR Project that “development of an invasive weed management plan as part of the vegetation management plan would facilitate an integrated approach to control effects, and is appropriate for all project lands.” FERC also suggests in the Final EIS that noxious and invasive weed management could be a component of the recreation management plan and the roads and facilities management plan. The Stewardship Council recommends a companion noxious weed management plan for any PG&E lands outside the Project boundary not covered in any future FERC license required plans.

## **Sustainable Forestry**

**Potential Measure:**

- *Evaluate existing timber inventory data and supplement as appropriate.*

Recommendations integrate sustainable forestry practices into the management of the six Timber Management Units (TMUs) within the planning unit as a complementary measure benefiting habitat values. Forest management activities within the planning unit occur primarily outside the FERC boundary and have not been directly addressed within the relicensing process, with the exception of an anticipated vegetation management plan that will focus on fuel load management. PG&E’s forest management practices have been conservative in recent years, and the required

timber harvesting plans that have guided forestry activities have incorporated protection of habitat values. However, review of these practices may reveal additional opportunities to more fully incorporate sustainable forestry standards, particularly on the five TMUs managed for sustainable timber production.

**Potential Measure:**

- *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 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. The forest management plan would be compatible with the vegetation management plan addressing lands within the FERC boundary that is anticipated to follow relicensing. Coordination with the USFS (Lassen and Plumas National Forests) would be required in development of the plan to promote consistency with management of the surrounding USFS lands. The USFS has submitted license conditions to FERC that include additional actions and plans for the management and protection of biological, recreation, and cultural resources. The forest management plan should also be coordinated with relevant county plans.

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:**

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

The CDF has recorded hundreds of small fires in the Lake Almanor region over the past few decades, most of which occurred close to developed areas. In the UNFFR Project Final EIS, FERC proposes development of a fire prevention and response plan that would address fuels treatment and vegetation management, prevention, emergency response preparedness, reporting, and extinguishing and controlling fires. To increase fire preparedness and enhance fire prevention, the Stewardship Council recommends developing a fire management and response plan for lands outside the FERC boundary consistent with any future FERC license mandated plan. The content of the plan should mirror that of any required UNFFR plan.

**Potential Measure:**

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

Management of fuels is very important in reducing fire risk. The proposed UNFFR vegetation management plan will contain analysis of fuel loads near Project features and treatments to be

employed to reduce ignition hazard. However, this plan would only apply to lands within the FERC boundary. Therefore, the Stewardship Council recommends developing a fuels management plan for lands outside the FERC boundary consistent with measures in the proposed UNFFR vegetation management plan to ensure long-term forest health and reduce fuel loading and fire hazard. The recommended fuels management plan could include a controlled fire component that could reduce wildfire danger and enhance deer winter range. The fuels management plan would identify when and where controlled fire would be an appropriate fuel reduction technique, and where fuel reduction would be accomplished by thinning or other mechanical means. Development of the fuels management plan should be coordinated with relevant county plans, as well as the recommended forest management, noxious weed management, and wildlife and habitat management plans.

## **Preservation of Historic Values**

The Maidu community has expressed interest in preserving access to traditional plant gathering sites and in managing plant resources to facilitate cultural uses. A local Maidu group has been working since 2003 to meet similar objectives on nearby USFS lands through the Maidu Stewardship Project, a 10-year contract with the USFS to demonstrate Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) within the area of the project. The objective of the project has been “to incorporate indigenous knowledge into progressive forestry” with specific objectives emphasizing enhancement of culturally important plants such as willows, oaks, and grasses, among others. The 190-acre cluster of parcels near Highway 89 is near traditional plant gathering areas and may be appropriate for Maidu stewardship using TEK practices, using the USFS pilot program as a model for a similar program on the planning unit. Initiation of TEK management on these parcels would give Maidu groups the opportunity to apply the lessons learned on the USFS lands.

### **Potential Measures:**

- *Conduct surveys of lands outside the FERC boundary to identify cultural resources and enable their protection.*
- *Conduct an ethnographic study of lands outside the FERC boundary to identify traditional use areas.*
- *Develop a cultural resource management plan to protect cultural resources outside the FERC boundary consistent with the HPMP.*
- *Coordinate with Native American entities when conducting cultural resource measures.*

The study area used in FERC relicensing cultural resource studies did not include planning unit lands outside the FERC boundary. As a result, cultural resource surveys are needed to identify any cultural resources on those lands and enable their protection. An ethnographic study of these lands to identify traditional use areas is also needed. Finally, a cultural resource management plan would be developed as a companion to any future plan that may be required by the new FERC Project License to ensure the protection of any cultural values present. These measures would be coordinated with Native American entities and would complement the assessment of the parcels discussed above for locating a Maidu Cultural Center and for Maidu TEK stewardship.

**Potential Measure:**

- *Assess potential for a future Maidu Cultural Center on the parcels near Highways 89 and 147.*

The Stewardship Council also recommends assessment of potential sites for a Maidu Cultural Center. Maidu groups and other area stakeholders have expressed interest in establishing a Maidu cultural interpretive and learning center in the area. The Project 2105 Committee, a group composed of local residents, has also listed establishment of a cultural center as an objective. Although local museums display Maidu artifacts and provide information to the public about Maidu history, no such cultural center exists. A non-profit group founded in part to develop a Maidu Cultural Center describes it as a place for Indians and non-Indians to learn Maidu language, arts, and crafts, and as a gathering place for traditional Maidu festivals and celebrations. The Greenville Rancheria has expressed interest in two specific sites for such a facility: a parcel on the west shore of the lake along Highway 89, and a cluster of parcels near the east shore of the lake along Highway 147 (east of the highway). Also, the cluster of four parcels southwest of Prattville in the area of Highway 89 and the Butt Valley Reservoir Road junction appear to provide an opportunity within the planning unit for a cultural center site. Any of these potential sites (which are close to the highways) would provide good visibility and convenient access to the public.

**Potential Measure:**

- *Assess the potential to develop a program with Maidu groups to incorporate Traditional Ecological Knowledge in forest management.*

The combination of a Maidu Cultural Center and Maidu TEK stewardship on the parcels that comprise the Prattville Tunnel TMU provide an opportunity for involvement of local Maidu groups in sustainable forestry and land management while enhancing opportunities for continuing their cultural practices and for sharing those practices with the wider community, including those attracted to the area by its recreation amenities. The application of TEK practices on the lands surrounding a potential cultural center may present a unique opportunity for incorporating the on-the-ground stewardship activities with the objectives and activities of the cultural center. Alternatively, the Prattville Tunnel parcels could be devoted to Maidu TEK stewardship, while the assessment of the potential of parcels for a Maidu Cultural Center could focus on the two sites (on Highways 89 and 147) proposed by the Greenville Rancheria.

Because all three of these potential sites are on or near the Federally designated Scenic Byway, special consideration would need to be given to aesthetic issues. Each of the sites appears to provide opportunities for screening structures with native forest vegetation. Recommendations include the assessment of sites for a Maidu Cultural Center as a potentially unique addition to the range of recreation opportunities available to Lake Almanor visitors. Although opportunities to advance this community interest have not arisen from FERC Project relicensing, the cultural center could also be an integral part of the Interpretation and Education Program to be developed following issuance of the new License. Further, the cultural center concept may advance the USFS goal of providing public interpretive opportunities along the Scenic Byway.

The measures recommended related to the Maidu Cultural Center site and Maidu TEK stewardship would have substantial benefits for preservation of cultural resources, particularly in the form of opportunities for participation in those programs for Maidu tribe members. Although the driving purpose is cultural preservation, the desired educational and interpretive function of

the potential cultural center suggests that this measure would also enhance recreation opportunities in the area.

## **Open Space**

### **Potential Measure:**

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

Lastly, the Stewardship Council recommends conservation easements precluding future development and preserving open space on the currently undeveloped lands above the 4,500-foot elevation. These parcels include the lands above the southeast shore of the lake, lands on either side of the mouth of Bailey Creek, and lands surrounding Last Chance Marsh. Open space is an important value of the lands adjacent to the Lake Almanor shoreline but outside the FERC boundary, especially for visitors to the reservoir and travelers on the scenic byways. In their undeveloped state, these lands also preserve water quality and provide wildlife habitat. Bald eagle nests have been documented close to some of these lands. Although most of the lands above the southeast shoreline are separated from the highway by the railroad with few crossings of the rail line available, some of the area is zoned rural residential and residential by Plumas County, suggesting there may be a long-term threat of development. The Bailey Creek area is zoned recreational by the County and appears to be less threatened, although the surrounding peninsula lands are rapidly developing with residential and golf communities. Conservation easements would describe all prohibited uses to maintain open space values, including the level of uses allowed and the requirement to maintain scenic qualities, as well as the reservation of rights for campgrounds and other FERC license required features.

## **Agricultural Uses**

None recommended.