

Butte Creek Planning Unit

Outdoor Recreation

The recommended recreation measures focus on the restoration and enhancement of public access and a limited amount of semi-primitive outdoor recreation in the canyon (day use, hiking, angling, and whitewater boating), as well as enhancement of facilities and recreation opportunities on the ridge. The primary goal is to explore the potential for improved recreation access in the canyon while continuing to protect the important Butte Creek fishery and within the constraints of hydropower operations, security, and public safety needs. Local communities and specific user groups such as whitewater boaters and anglers have expressed interest in improved access.

Potential Measures:

- *Assess the potential for providing controlled seasonal access to the DeSabra Powerhouse area to allow whitewater boaters and anglers to use the creek.*
- *Explore regaining seasonal access to the west side of Butte Creek via Helltown Road with private landowner.*
- *If access to Helltown Road is not regained, assess the potential for providing access to the east side of Butte Creek via the existing canal access road.*
- *If access via the canal road is feasible, construct a parking and small day use area at the end of the canal road and construct a trail to the creek.*
- *Provide a whitewater boating put-in/take-out at Helltown Road if access is regained from private landowner or near new day use area on the east side of the creek if canal road access is feasible.*

Assessment of the potential for re-establishment of formerly available access to Butte Creek would include access at DeSabra Powerhouse via the powerhouse access road owned by PG&E. Whitewater boating guidebooks describe this location as the start of the whitewater boating run in the canyon, and it would also provide angling access. Public access to the private Helltown Road, which crosses Butte Creek near the lower end of the planning unit, would restore walk-in access to a parcel on the west side of Butte Creek for boaters and anglers. Alternatively, use of a PG&E canal road would provide access on the opposite side of the creek in the same area. This area of the creek, referred to as Whiskey Flat, is the end of an expert-level whitewater run that starts at DeSabra Powerhouse. It is also the start of a moderately difficult whitewater run extending downstream to Centerville Powerhouse or Centerville Bridge. Priority would be placed on re-establishing access to Helltown Road; use of the canal access road for recreation access would not be pursued if seasonal access to Helltown Road could be achieved. Parking and whitewater put-in and take-out sites would be designated in conjunction with these restored and new access points, if access is obtained. A small parking and day use area with basic picnic and sanitary facilities would be provided at the terminus of the canal road.

Several known constraints to providing public access on the above roads would need to be addressed. Reopening DeSabra Powerhouse Road to provide access to the creek at the upper end of the canyon would require that past problems with parked vehicles blocking access to the powerhouse, vandalism and dumping, and other operations, security, and public safety issues be

addressed satisfactorily. According to PG&E, the road is not designed to a standard that will safely accommodate public use, so road improvements would also be necessary. The upper 100 feet of the road crosses private land with an easement that allows only PG&E use. (However, the road is currently used by the public to reach the Forks of Butte Creek trailhead.) Because the road also provides access to the Forks of Butte Creek Project land and facilities (powerhouse and switchyard), security concerns related to those facilities would also need to be considered. Similarly, use of the PG&E canal/flume access road on the east side of the creek would probably require improvements to allow public use and to protect the water conveyance facilities (canal/flume) and would need to be evaluated for operational security requirements.

The private owner of Helltown Road beyond the gate may not be willing to permit public access, and may consider issues such as security, fire risk, and potential depreciative behavior by the public to preclude allowing public access. Also, the condition of the road and the bridge over Butte Creek is not known. The Stewardship Council recommends only exploring the potential for future public use of Helltown Road with the owner in cooperation with boater groups, anglers and others interested in access, if such use is feasible; no direct management measures are recommended since the road is not on planning unit lands.

Security and related concerns may be reduced by limiting public access to these roads to specific times of the year — angling and whitewater boating seasons, for example — as well as by maintaining control of access with gate closures at night. Also, vehicle access to whitewater put-in and take-out locations at DeSabra Powerhouse and road-end parking areas in the canyon could be further limited to a maximum number of vehicles or to shuttle vehicles only, with use of the road monitored during the season to ensure that restrictions are followed, under an advance arrangement with user groups. FERC approved such part-time access to Butte Creek near the DeSabra Powerhouse, following a schedule recommended by DFG, during the construction of the Forks of Butte Creek Project in the later 1980s.

Any changes in recreation use in the canyon would require protection of anadromous fish and their habitat in compliance with requirements conferred by their listed status. It is expected that relicensing studies focusing on recreation and the Butte Creek fishery would identify the potential for recreation disturbance to fish habitat and fish, and seasonal variation in vulnerability of the resource. This information will shed light on the potential for increased recreation access and use in the context of fishery needs and requirements for protection.

The semi-primitive recreation emphasis for the canyon lands is intended to be consistent with BLM management of the Forks of Butte Creek Recreation Area, which would preserve the potential for collaborative management of the canyon's resources with BLM. Most of the canyon parcels are adjacent to BLM lands. BLM management direction for the area, as set forth in the most recent plan, focuses on continued semi-primitive recreation management along with designation of the area as an Outstanding Natural Area/Area of Critical Environmental Concern. Collaborative management could occur under a coordinated resource management plan developed with BLM, a management model used by BLM for other lands in the region. Although increased disturbance of fish and wildlife may result from additional recreation, the expectation is that impacts would be minor. Recommended management plans would include protection of the fishery as a top priority. Recommendations regarding access and necessary support facilities would also need to be evaluated for compatibility with the Wild and Scenic River designation eligibility of the segment of Butte Creek down to Helltown Bridge.

Potential Measures:

- *Rehabilitate the group picnic area across Skyway Road from DeSabra Forebay.*
- *Construct a family picnic area north of Skyway Road.*

Opportunities exist on the ridge parcels to further serve the recreation needs of the growing ridge communities. Therefore, the Stewardship Council recommends providing new and enhanced developed recreation sites for picnicking and angling on the ridge parcels to increase recreation opportunities in the growing ridge area. At DeSabra Forebay, the emphasis would be on improving the aesthetic quality of the fishing access areas on the dam and shoreline, protecting the shoreline from impacts, and providing shade. The existing group picnic facility across the road from the forebay would be rehabilitated to restore outdated and dilapidated facilities. A small family picnic area would be provided in the mature mixed conifer timberlands to the north to complement the group picnic area, whose use requires a reservation and payment of a fee.

Potential Measure:

- *Enhance public access to PSEA camp at DeSabra Forebay.*

The Pacific Service Employees Association's (PSEA) Camp DeSabra provides several cabins and associated facilities on the west shore of DeSabra Forebay for the use of their members (PG&E employees, retirees, and family members). The Stewardship Council recommends developing a program to provide public access to the PSEA cabins, thereby similarly extending the benefit of those resources to the general public.

Potential Measure:

- *Develop a recreation management plan for areas outside the FERC boundary.*

A recreation plan for the DeSabra Centerville Project will likely be developed as a result of the ongoing FERC Project relicensing. The DeSabra Forebay, group picnic area, and DeSabra Powerhouse area are within the FERC boundary, and so would be addressed within that plan. However, over 90% of the planning unit is outside the FERC boundary. Therefore, the Stewardship Council recommends developing a recreation plan that addresses planning unit lands outside the FERC boundary as a companion to any future FERC license required recreation plan. Any measures recommended for areas within the FERC boundary would need to be consistent with any future FERC license required recreation plan.

Fish, Plant, and Wildlife Habitat

The Stewardship Council recommends habitat protection measures focused on aquatic habitat in Butte Creek for special status anadromous fish (wild spring-run chinook salmon and steelhead trout). The primary goal is to protect the diverse plant and wildlife habitat present in this rapidly developing region while continuing to limit public access to minimize impacts on the anadromous fishery.

Potential Measure:

- *Conduct surveys of lands outside the FERC boundary to identify biological resources and enable their protection.*

Though part of the planning unit lies within the FERC boundary and would therefore be incorporated into any habitat and species studies conducted for relicensing, it is likely that lands

outside the FERC boundary would not be studied as part of relicensing. Therefore, the Stewardship Council recommends conducting surveys of lands outside the FERC boundary to identify biological resources and thus gain a broader understanding of existing habitats and species to better enable their protection. Such information would be valuable in making future management decisions. Lands outside the FERC boundary include most lands in Butte Creek Canyon not associated with project roads, powerhouses, canals/flumes, penstocks, and related features.

Potential Measure:

- *Encourage developing noxious weed management measures and/or plan in relicensing and extend measures to lands outside the FERC boundary.*

A project relicensing study will identify and map noxious weeds on Federal lands within the FERC boundary and adjacent planning unit lands. To enhance habitat for native and special status plants, the Stewardship Council recommends encouraging the development of noxious weed management measures and/or a noxious weed management plan in relicensing and then extending any developed measures or plan to lands outside the FERC boundary. If noxious weed management measures or a plan are not developed in relicensing, then a plan should be developed for the entire planning unit.

Potential Measure:

- *Develop a wildlife and habitat management plan for the planning unit, consistent with plans developed through project relicensing.*

To provide a comprehensive vision for habitat protection and enhancement within the planning unit, the Stewardship Council recommends creating a wildlife and habitat management plan. Once recommended biological resource surveys are completed, potential habitat enhancements can be identified and developed into a comprehensive plan describing goals and objectives for habitat and species, as well as measures to enhance and protect habitat for both plant and wildlife species. Monitoring of species and/or habitats would also be developed as a component of the plan. The wildlife and habitat management plan should be developed in conjunction with the noxious weed, forest, and fuels management plans. The wildlife and habitat management plan should also be consistent with relevant FERC license required plans developed as part of the project relicensing.

Sustainable Forestry

Potential Measure:

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

Although most of the planning unit is forested with hardwood and conifer trees, less than one-fourth of the planning unit is included in the two PG&E Timber Management Units (TMUs). Inventory data exist for these TMUs but not for other forested areas. Therefore, the Stewardship Council recommends an evaluation of existing timber inventory data and supplementation of the data as appropriate to provide more complete data coverage.

Potential Measure:

- *Encourage developing fuels management measures and/or plan in relicensing and extend measures to lands outside the FERC boundary to ensure long-term forest health and reduce fuel loading and fire hazard.*

Lands in the planning unit have high fire risk and fire hazard reduction is of high importance to local communities. To reduce fuel loading and fire risk, the Stewardship Council recommends encouraging the development of fuels management measures and/or plan in relicensing and then extending the measures to lands outside the FERC boundary (recognizing that most of the planning unit is outside the FERC boundary). If fuels management measures and/or a plan are not developed in relicensing, then a plan should be developed for the entire planning unit.

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 watershed management, supporting the enhancement of other BPVs over the long term. The forest management plan would be compatible with adjacent USFS and BLM forest management where appropriate to maintain habitat connectivity. Development of the forest management plan should be coordinated with development of the wildlife and habitat, noxious weed, and fuels management 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 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.*

As previously mentioned, the planning unit includes lands near residential areas on Paradise Ridge and in the lower Butte Creek Canyon, as well as recreation facilities near DeSabra Forebay that receive heavy recreation use during certain times of the year. Therefore, the Stewardship Council recommends developing a fire management and response plan to ensure fire preparedness and enhance fire prevention. The plan would include appropriate actions to take when a fire occurs, as well as reporting procedures that would be useful for the local communities.

Preservation of Historic Values

Potential Measures:

- *Conduct surveys outside the FERC Project APE to identify cultural resources and enable their protection.*
- *Coordinate with Native American entities when conducting cultural resource measures.*

Cultural resource investigations are being conducted within the DeSabra-Centerville Project area for relicensing. Though the area within the FERC Project Area of Potential Effects (APE) will be thoroughly documented, it is unclear the extent to which the area outside the APE has been studied, possibly for timber harvests and other activities. With a potential for cultural sites outside the APE, but within the planning unit, the Stewardship Council recommends conducting surveys outside the DeSabra-Centerville Project APE to identify cultural resources and enable their protection. Documentation efforts should be coordinated with Native American entities.

Potential Measures:

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

There may also be a potential for ethnographic uses by Native Americans within the planning unit. Relicensing studies will include documentation of traditional cultural properties within the FERC Project APE. The Stewardship Council recommends conducting an ethnographic study of lands outside the FERC boundary to identify traditional use areas outside the FERC boundary. The ethnographic study should be coordinated with Native American entities.

Potential Measures:

- *Develop a cultural resources management plan for lands outside the FERC Project APE consistent with the cultural agreements and plans developed as a result of project relicensing.*
- *Coordinate with Native American entities when conducting cultural resource measures.*

Assuming that the recommended surveys and ethnographic study identify cultural sites and traditional use areas, the Stewardship Council recommends developing a cultural resources management plan for the area outside the DeSabra-Centerville Project APE to ensure that cultural resources are adequately protected in the future. The plan would include appropriate measures for the identification, evaluation, and treatment of cultural resources (archaeological and historical), as well as 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 consistent with the agreements and plans developed in project relicensing and should be coordinated with Native American entities.

Open Space

Potential Measure:

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

The undeveloped canyon parcels would continue to be preserved as open space, with only minor new recreation development. Most of the ridge-top parcels would remain in timber. Viewsheds and open space would be further protected through permanent conservation easements. The undeveloped setting of former mining camps and mines scattered in the planning unit would be protected through open space preservation.

Agricultural Uses

None recommended.