

Eel River Planning Unit

Fish, Plant, and Wildlife Habitat

Potential Measure:

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

There appears to be very little biological information available; however, there is a high potential for a wide array of species and habitats to flourish within the planning unit. This potential is based on surrounding California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB) species records as well as the USFWS mapped late successional habitat buffer for northern spotted owl habitat, which covers the entire planning area. However, the existing biological information within the planning unit consists mainly of yearly fish counts from the Van Arsdale Fisheries Station and annual monitoring of bald eagles around Lake Pillsbury. There is limited information on potential species on adjacent USFS land, and no confirmed habitat or species information for planning unit lands. The Stewardship Council recommends conducting surveys of the planning unit to identify biological resources, including terrestrial and aquatic habitats and species, to provide a better understanding of the existing resources and potential for enhancement. A particular focus of recommended surveys would be the identification of late successional habitat, including habitat location, size, and status.

Potential Measure:

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

Noxious weeds are known to occur within the planning unit, north of Oak Flat Campground into the Sheriff's Posse area, and likely occur in other areas throughout the planning unit. The Lake Pillsbury area receives heavy recreation use, and thus there is potential for recreationists and their vehicles to spread noxious weeds throughout the area. Currently, there is no noxious weed management plan for the planning unit area. To protect native habitat and plants, the Stewardship Council recommends developing a noxious weed management plan for the entire planning unit. Development of the noxious weed management plan should be coordinated with Lake and Mendocino Counties, the USFS, and development of the wildlife and habitat, fuels, and forest management plans.

Potential Measure:

- *Work with USFS to enhance tule elk habitat north of Lake Pillsbury.*

A herd of reintroduced tule elk, a species endemic to California, currently inhabits the area north of Lake Pillsbury. The Lake Pillsbury valley floor contains deer winter range, and opportunities exist to improve both elk and deer habitat around the lake. USFS staff and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation have already performed habitat enhancements for the elk in this area on USFS land, and believe there is potential for additional enhancement on planning unit lands. Opportunities exist to manage mixed conifer and oak woodland areas to benefit early seral dependent and oak woodland dependent species and increase fire resiliency. To provide high quality habitat for tule elk, a species that has recovered from the brink of extinction, the Stewardship Council recommends working with the USFS to enhance habitat on planning unit lands north of Lake Pillsbury.

Potential Measure:

- *Further protect and enhance habitat in the lower Eel River Bridge area.*

With the closure of the River Road, the area around the Eel River at the lower Eel River Bridge is one of the few flat, accessible river areas provided along the County Road. Therefore, this site receives dispersed recreation use, including OHV use and RV camping along the river and/or in the river bed (on gravel bars). Current management has attempted to stop vehicles from entering the riparian and instream areas of the river with concrete barriers; however, field visits have made it evident that vehicles are still getting into these sensitive areas. The Stewardship Council recommends further protecting and enhancing riparian and instream habitat at the lower Eel River Bridge area to protect the valuable anadromous fish habitat within the Eel River. Specific protection and enhancement measures would have to be evaluated for their effectiveness, and more than one measure may be needed. Potential measures could include vegetation planting, bouldering, signage, and formalized parking areas.

Potential Measure:

- *Develop a wildlife and habitat management plan for the planning unit.*

The Eel River Planning Unit provides habitat for a variety of species, including potentially many special status species and late successional habitat-dependent species. To provide a comprehensive vision for habitat protection and enhancement within the planning unit, the Stewardship Council recommends developing 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 needed to enhance and protect habitat for both plants and wildlife. 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 as well as habitat enhancement and protection measures already described herein.

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 include only minor recreation development and are not expected to decrease the scenic quality of the viewsheds.

Outdoor Recreation

Potential Measure:

- *Conduct a whitewater boating study focusing on describing use of the three runs, need for additional facilities, and effect of the new flow regime on whitewater boating.*

There are three whitewater runs within or partially within the planning unit: upper Eel River run, Rice Fork run, and the Pillsbury run. There is no recreation use information for these runs,

preferences and needs of boaters, or how the flow regime from the recent License Amendment has affected whitewater boating on the Pillsbury run. Therefore, the Stewardship Council recommends conducting a whitewater boating study, describing uses of the three whitewater runs, needs for additional facilities, and effect of the new flow regime on whitewater boating. Such a study would provide background information that could be used in future recreation management decisions.

Potential Measure:

- *Coordinate OHV use with Mendocino National Forest OHV route designation efforts.*

OHV use is very popular on Mendocino National Forest lands, with several motorized trails that lead away from the lake on the northeast and northwest sides. OHV use is a common, designated use in the northern Lake Pillsbury area, and more than one USFS designated motorized trail cross planning unit lands. To provide continuous motorized routes in acceptable locations, the Stewardship Council recommends coordinating OHV use with Mendocino National Forest OHV route designation efforts that are currently taking place. After routes within the planning unit have been identified and designated in conjunction with Mendocino National Forest efforts, non-designated OHV routes in unacceptable locations can be evaluated for closure and/or restoration.

Potential Measure:

- *Provide wildlife viewing facilities in the northwest corner of the planning unit.*

A herd of reintroduced tule elk inhabit the area north of Lake Pillsbury, particularly the area northwest of the lake. Tule elk are endemic to California and were once on the brink of extinction; thus, it is an unusual opportunity to see them in the wild. However, there are no wildlife viewing facilities (such as a platform) available within the planning unit or on adjacent USFS land. Planning unit lands in the northwest corner of the Lake Pillsbury area offer an ideal location for wildlife viewing, where both tule elk and waterfowl would be visible. In addition, the main access road along the northern part of the lake runs through planning unit lands in the northwest corner and would provide ideal access to a wildlife viewing area. The Stewardship Council recommends providing wildlife viewing facilities in the area northwest of the lake to enhance nature appreciation and wildlife viewing use of the planning unit and educate users on native wildlife.

Potential Measure:

- *Provide shoreline access at the Fuller Grove campgrounds.*

The Stewardship Council recommends providing shoreline access at the Fuller Grove Campground and Group Camp. Reaching the shoreline at both campgrounds is generally a difficult and unsafe task, as there is a steep drop-off, up to several feet high, from the shoreline to the water's edge at some of the lakeshore at both campgrounds. As the lake level lowers, this drop-off becomes even greater, particularly at the Group Camp. Boats and innertubes sometimes moor along the shoreline at both campgrounds, indicating that users could be making the descent to the shoreline several times a day. It is not only unsafe to climb down such a drop-off along the shoreline, but it also causes erosion and sedimentation into the lake. Rather than doing erosion work at Fuller Grove Boat Ramp, PG&E plans to relocate the picnic area. However, no actions are planned for erosion around the other Fuller Grove recreation areas. The Stewardship Council therefore recommends providing safe shoreline access at both Fuller Grove campgrounds to stop visitors from eroding the shoreline and potentially unsafe shoreline access. Potential shoreline access routes and structures (such as hardened paths or stairs) would need to be further studied for

feasibility. If access is not feasible at the Fuller Grove campgrounds then signage posting available safe shoreline access at other sites should be posted.

Potential Measure:

- *Assess the potential to use the Sheriff's Posse area for educational use.*

The Sheriff's Posse area is an informal camping and equestrian facility that was formerly leased for use (one to four weekends per year) by the Lake County Sheriff's Department Search and Rescue Training Operations. The Stewardship Council recommends assessing the potential to use the Sheriff's Posse area for educational uses. The area could be used for programs related to topics such as traditional use, orienteering, horse packing, nature walks, and plant identification. The site is ideal for programs that require open space away from developed sites. The Sheriff's Posse area could also be used for activities or programs as a staging area or informal camping area if a non-developed camping experience is desired. An assessment of the site for safety and potential conflicts with tule elk would be needed before educational use could be allowed.

Potential Measure:

- *Determine future use and management of the River Road from the Bucknell Creek Bridge to the lower Eel River Bridge.*

The other main access road, River Road, runs along the south side of the river and has been closed the past couple of years due to landslides. Portions of the road cross planning unit lands and were maintained by the USFS prior to the closure by virtue of an easement PG&E conveyed to the USFS. Over the years, there have been significant landslides in the area which have resulted in expensive repairs in order to keep the road open for public access. In light of the history of geologic instability and recent landslides over the last couple of years, and lack of funding to complete the repairs, the Mendocino National Forest issued a Forest Safety Closure Order in March 2004 and the road is officially closed to vehicle access. River Road, however, provides better river access as the road is located close to the river's edge, versus the County Road which climbs high above it. Due to the geologic instability and cost of maintaining River Road, it may not be feasible to continue using the road for vehicle access. It may be more feasible to maintain the road as a multiple use trail to continue public access to the Eel River and provide a trail facility in the river canyon, which would reduce maintenance costs. However, vehicular access on portions of the road may be necessary to retain management access or adjacent landowner access. Therefore, the Stewardship Council recommends determining future use and management of the River Road from the Bucknell Creek Bridge to the lower Eel River Bridge as this area provides the best river access and appears to be necessary for private landowner access.

Potential Measure:

- *Develop a recreation management plan for lands outside the FERC boundary in coordination with the USFS and other stakeholders.*

The original Recreation Plan, Exhibit R, was ordered by FERC in PG&E's 1983 License Order. Lake Pillsbury is a major recreation destination and receives heavy recreation use, particularly during the summer. Currently, 70% of the planning unit is not covered under the existing Recreation Plan. Therefore, the Stewardship Council recommends developing a recreation management plan for lands outside the FERC boundary in coordination with stakeholders and the USFS, as facilities, management, and uses on National Forest System (NFS) lands are integral counterparts to planning unit lands. Suggested elements of the recreation management plan

include developing a recreation monitoring program, evaluating recreation needs (e.g., ADA facilities, alternative camping facilities, etc.), developing a dispersed recreation use management component, and developing an operations and maintenance program. Law enforcement is provided by Mendocino and Lake Counties, as well as the USFS. Many people have raised the issue of a lack of law enforcement and unauthorized uses that are known to occur in the planning unit area. The recreation management plan should also coordinate law enforcement and seek to increase patrol of the area to reduce illegal and unauthorized uses. Management of unauthorized OHV use would also be addressed in the dispersed recreation use management component of the plan.

Potential Measure:

- *Develop an interpretation and education plan in coordination with the USFS.*

Along with updating the Recreation Plan, the Stewardship Council recommends developing an interpretation and education plan in coordination with the USFS. Interpretation and education are important components of the recreation experience and can offer new knowledge to visitors on many topics, guide their behavior, and foster stewardship of resources. Due to its potential for an immense wealth of natural and cultural resources, the planning unit offers a range of opportunities to educate visitors on a variety of topics. It is important to provide consistent format and information for interpretation and education resources; therefore, the plan would be developed in coordination with the USFS. Suggested elements of an interpretation and education plan include: evaluating the potential for an amphitheater at Lake Pillsbury; developing consistent information and directional signage; enhancing the informational kiosk by the road to the Lake Pillsbury Resort; developing educational programs with local schools, groups (4-H, Boy Scouts, etc.), and Native Americans; and developing interpretation programs and materials focusing on Sacramento pikeminnow suppression efforts, traditional use of the area, fisheries decline, special status species, tule elk, plant identification, and appropriate recreation use.

Sustainable Forestry

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.*

Currently, most of the timber in the Eel River Planning Unit is managed for multiple-uses, with sustained timber production as a main use of the land. Current management does acknowledge that other uses may preclude timber production in some areas. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Biological Opinion for the Potter Valley Project states that timber harvest activities have altered watershed conditions by changing the quantity and size distribution of sediment, and that ongoing forest activities on non-Federal lands in the watershed are likely to continue to degrade essential salmonid habitat values. There is late successional habitat as well as vital salmonid habitat in the Eel River and its tributaries. However, there is no overall documented vision for the Timber Management Units (TMUs) and the variety of forest habitats within the planning unit. Therefore, 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 adjacent LSR management where appropriate to maintain habitat connectivity. Development of the forest management plan should be coordinated with 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 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 fuels management plan consistent with the USFS Pillsbury Homesite, Westshore, and Pine Mountain LSR Fuels Reduction Projects 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 town of Potter Valley, existence of old-growth and late successional habitat within the planning unit, presence of a late successional reserve near the planning unit, high recreation use, and frequent human-caused fires at Lake Pillsbury. The USFS is already planning, or has enacted, fuel reduction projects on lands surrounding the planning unit at three sites: around the USFS summer homesite tract, around the Westshore lease area, and within the Pine Mountain LSR. These projects are part of the Federal government's Healthy Forests Initiative to reduce fuels and increase forest health, and are being conducted in part due to the amount of wildland-urban interface present in the area and a history of fire suppression that has resulted in heavy fuel loading. A wildfire in the planning unit area could have severe consequences for bald eagle and late successional habitat. There is no existing plan for management of fuels on planning unit lands. Therefore, to ensure long-term forest health and reduce fuel loading and fire hazard, the Stewardship Council recommends developing a fuels management plan consistent with USFS fuels reduction projects to ensure consistent management and maintenance of habitat connectivity. Development of the fuels management plan should also be coordinated with the wildlife and habitat, forest, and noxious weed management plans.

Potential Measure:

- *Develop a fire management and response plan in coordination with the CDF and USFS, which includes training of campground hosts, to ensure fire preparedness.*

The Stewardship Council also recommends developing a fire management and response plan to ensure fire preparedness by guiding fire fighting and reporting methods and responsibility. The CDF and USFS are both responsible for administering State fire laws on planning unit lands, and there is already a formal Cooperative Fire Protection Agreement between these two agencies. This agreement, however, may not include the training of campground hosts in fire response and safety or other fire reporting methods. Training of campground hosts is vital to evacuating visitors, as they are important points of contact throughout the planning unit. The Stewardship Council recommends specifically including training of campground hosts in the fire management and response plan, in addition to articulating the specific fire fighting and response methods both agencies should use and how fire management will be coordinated between the two agencies.

Potential Measure:

- *Investigate the potential for a traditional management demonstration area within the planning unit.*

The Maidu, the Native American tribal group that live in the Feather River Watershed, currently have a USFS pilot stewardship program near Lake Almanor where they manage forest resources based on Traditional Ecological Knowledge practices. 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. Native American entities have suggested that traditional practices could also be used within the Eel River Planning Unit. The Stewardship Council recommends investigating the potential for a traditional management demonstration area within the planning unit in coordination with Native American entities.

Agricultural Uses

None recommended.

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.*

Only 15% of the total Potter Valley Project area within the FERC boundary has been systematically inventoried for cultural resources, and none of the 16 known cultural sites have been evaluated for NRHP eligibility. Additionally, none of the lands outside the FERC boundary have been surveyed for cultural resources. The USFS also believes that water level fluctuation at Lake Pillsbury may be negatively impacting any cultural resources on lands below the high water line, which have never been surveyed. The Lake Pillsbury area is a high sensitivity area for cultural resources due to the flat terrain and presence of reliable water sources, including rivers and springs. Additionally, salmon and steelhead likely provided a reliable food supply. The Stewardship Council recommends conducting surveys of the entire 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.*

The Stewardship Council also recommends conducting an ethnographic study of the planning unit to identify traditional use areas. This study would help determine historical use of the area and whether any areas are still being used today. The study would also identify ethnobotanical sites and potential sites. Native Americans have expressed interest in herbal treatments and ethnobotanical sites could provide areas to grow the necessary ingredients for such treatments. 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.*

Assuming that the recommended surveying and ethnographic study identify cultural sites and traditional use areas within the planning unit, the Stewardship Council recommends developing a cultural resources management plan 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), 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. Known archaeological sites within the FERC boundary are located in areas that are ideal for recreation use; therefore, information on cultural resources is important both to future protection and educating recreation users on history of the area and how to protect cultural resources. Information from cultural resource surveys and the ethnographic study could be included as appropriate into programs and materials associated with the recommended interpretation and education plan. In addition, opportunities for cultural educational facilities could also be identified. Development of the cultural resources management plan should be coordinated with Native American entities.