

Blue Lakes Planning Unit

Outdoor Recreation

Existing recreation opportunities would continue, and several new and enhanced recreation opportunities are recommended. The Blue Lakes area has a 1,000 Persons at One Time (PAOT) capacity, as designated during relicensing for the new Mokelumne Project FERC License. Recommended facilities are not intended to greatly increase the number of users in this area, but rather are intended to enhance the recreation experience for existing visitors.

Potential Measure:

- *Evaluate adding a new day use area at Upper Blue Lake.*

Measures to enhance the recreation experience in the Blue Lakes area include evaluating the addition of a formal day use area at Upper Blue Lake where none currently exists. Developed day use facilities are currently available at Lower Blue Lake and Twin Lake; however, Upper Blue Lake currently only provides developed overnight accommodations. Boating, fishing, and swimming currently occur at Upper Blue Lake, indicating that there may be a need for a formalized day use area. Prior to implementation, studies would need to be completed to evaluate the need for such a facility as well as determine if a suitable location exists. Studies would also need to determine if associated parking needs would be able to be accommodated in this area as well as if the established PAOT for Blue Lakes would be affected by the addition of a new day use area.

Potential Measure:

- *Evaluate adding trail access between the four lakes.*

In addition to evaluating a new day use area at Upper Blue Lake, the Stewardship Council recommends evaluating the addition of trail access connecting all four lakes. Although hiking takes place throughout this area, there are no designated trails fully connecting the lakes. If the USFS is amenable to this idea, cooperation with the agency would be necessary as a trail connecting the four lakes would cross over USFS lands. Such a trail would provide an additional formalized day use opportunity for visitors as well as discourage vehicular use when traveling from lake to lake. Existing trail segments around the lakes could be incorporated into this recommended trail network. Due to the presence of cultural sites near the shorelines of these lakes, the area should be surveyed for cultural resources prior to implementation. An assessment should also be conducted to ensure that the new trail would not restrict wildlife access to the water or substantially decrease habitat connectivity. The western/northern shores of the lakes should be maintained for viewshed, and additional recreation should not be encouraged if sensitive cultural resources and/or habitat are identified.

Potential Measure:

- *Assess the potential for youth program opportunities.*

Due to the outstanding opportunities to see and learn about rare species and prehistoric and historic uses in the Blue Lakes area, there are likely excellent opportunities to educate youth on a variety of topics within the planning unit. The adjacent Mokelumne Wilderness provides a similar learning opportunity. Therefore, the Stewardship Council recommends assessing the

potential for programs to teach youth about topics such as wildlife and botanical resources, including threatened and endangered species, as well as cultural resources.

Potential Measure:

- *Install interpretive signage about the history of hydropower, mining, local rare species, and prehistoric uses in the area.*

The Stewardship Council also recommends the addition of interpretive signage or displays depicting the history of mining activities, hydropower, prehistoric uses, and rare species found in the Blue Lakes area. This measure would educate the public about some of the values that make this area special and enhance their enjoyment and appreciation of those values. The addition of interpretive features could also encourage better stewardship of the area. Appropriate maintenance and updating of signage would be required to minimize potential vandalism and ensure that the content is current.

Fish, Plant, and Wildlife Habitat

Recommendations also include measures to protect habitat and cultural resources from potential damage due to existing, high volume recreation use.

Potential Measure:

- *Protect Twin Lake shoreline from vehicle access.*

Management of recreation uses would include protection of the shoreline at Twin Lake from vehicle access using boulders or revegetation, if appropriate. Although boulders are already used to restrict vehicle access to specific areas, the Twin Lake shoreline requires additional deterrents to keep vehicles away from the lake.

Potential Measures:

- *Formalize or close unauthorized OHV trails to protect biological resources.*
- *Formalize or close unauthorized OHV trails to protect cultural resources.*

The Stewardship Council recommends either formalize or close unauthorized OHV trails within the planning unit to protect sensitive resources and reduce erosion and sedimentation. The USFS has mapped unauthorized OHV trails on their lands and on surrounding lands. Unauthorized OHV trails on this planning unit often cross from PG&E to USFS lands; therefore, decisions to either formalize or close these trails should be made jointly. The USFS has not yet made decisions regarding formalizing or closure of unauthorized OHV routes on USFS lands, so the Stewardship Council recommends coordination with the USFS on any OHV route decisions to create consistency in management. If it is determined that unauthorized OHV trails are to be closed, vehicles should be restricted to established roads and damaged areas should be revegetated. Measures should be taken to continue to manage unauthorized uses through the use of gates, bouldering, revegetating of closed trails, as well as signage. Monitoring and continued management of OHV use would help control unauthorized uses in the future. Management of unauthorized OHV trails would reduce potential sources of road sediment and thereby protect water quality, biological resources, and cultural resources.

Potential Measures:

- *Restrict or formalize dispersed recreation use on the parcel by Deer Creek to protect valuable habitat.*
- *Restrict or formalize dispersed recreation use on the parcel by Deer Creek to protect cultural resources.*

The Stewardship Council also recommends formalizing or restricting informal recreation uses occurring on the parcel by Deer Creek. Informal recreation uses in this area include user-created trails, informal trailheads, and unofficial parking areas. Formalizing these uses could clarify appropriate recreation practices as well as protect cultural resources and sensitive habitat. Formalizing these uses could accommodate this apparent recreation need while deterring people from potentially destructive behavior in sensitive areas. Alternately, informal recreation uses could be restricted by revegetating and bouldering informal recreation sites where appropriate and posting signage to notify recreationists of this restriction. Formalizing or restricting dispersed use is recommended to protect this area's sensitive and valuable habitat as well as cultural resources. Studies should be conducted to determine the appropriate way to handle this informal use.

Potential Measure:

- *Support future Upper Mokelumne River Watershed Authority efforts to preserve water quality and identify protection and improvement projects that are most critical.*

In addition to managing recreation use to protect habitat values, the Stewardship Council recommends supporting future Upper Mokelumne River Watershed Authority (UMRWA) efforts at preserving water quality, water supply, and the environment in the Upper Mokelumne River Watershed. The UMRWA Project developed a water quality database to establish a baseline for a watershed water quality assessment of the Upper Mokelumne River and identified management measures for agencies to implement to maintain and improve source water quality in the watershed.

Potential Measure:

- *Manage areas bordering the Mokelumne Wilderness to complement adjacent wilderness values.*

It is recommended that the areas bordering the Mokelumne Wilderness be managed to complement the surrounding wilderness values of the Mokelumne Wilderness and to protect its high value resources. This would include managing recreation as primitive, not allowing motor vehicle use, protecting cultural resources, maintaining a visual quality of preservation (e.g., any trails and other related improvements should be designed to be as obscure as possible), maintaining natural condition of timber stands, and generally preserving the wilderness character of the land. Conservation easements would describe all prohibited uses to maintain open space values, including the level of uses allowed. Recommendations include only minor additions of recreation facilities and are not expected to decrease the scenic quality of the viewsheds.

Potential Measures:

- *Conduct surveys of lands outside the FERC boundary to identify biological resources and enable their protection.*
- *Develop a wildlife and habitat management plan for the planning unit.*

Though many biological resources studies were conducted for the Mokelumne River Project relicensing, these studies likely focused only on resources within the FERC boundary. Therefore, the Stewardship Council recommends conducting surveys of the planning unit, particularly for lands outside the FERC boundary, to identify biological resources and enable their protection. The Stewardship Council also recommends using biological resource survey data to create a wildlife and habitat management plan. The planning unit contains potential habitat for several special status species including pine marten, mountain yellow-legged frog, and Yosemite toad, and recommended surveys may reveal additional special status plants and wildlife. Once recommended surveys are completed, potential habitat enhancements and restoration opportunities 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 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 noxious weed, forest, and fuels management plans.

Potential Measure:

- *Develop a noxious weed management plan for areas not included in the FERC-mandated Noxious Weed Plan.*

Preparation and implementation of a Noxious Weed Plan was mandated as part of the Mokelumne River Project FERC License Order. This plan was prepared in 2002 and approved by the Eldorado National Forest. The noxious weed survey area included USFS land inside the FERC boundary as well as adjacent PG&E FERC lands. The Stewardship Council recommends preparation and implementation of a noxious weed management plan for those areas of the planning unit not covered by the FERC license required Noxious Weed Plan. This measure is recommended to eradicate existing populations of noxious weeds where possible and implement preventative measures to minimize the spread of weeds in the future. This plan would also provide for more consistent management of noxious weeds with adjacent management and should be coordinated with PG&E and the USFS. This plan should be developed in conjunction with the fuels, forest management, and wildlife and habitat management plans.

Preservation of Historic Values**Potential Measures:**

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

It is likely that cultural resources surveys conducted for relicensing efforts were limited to the Area of Potential Effects (APE) for the FERC Project, generally defined as all lands within the FERC boundary. Therefore, lands outside the APE were likely not surveyed. There is a high likelihood of cultural sites outside the APE; therefore, the Stewardship Council recommends conducting surveys outside the APE to identify cultural resources and enable their protection. Documentation of cultural sites should be coordinated with local Native American entities.

Potential Measures:

- *Develop a cultural resources management plan for areas not already included in the FERC-mandated Heritage Resources Management Plan (HRMP).*

- *Coordinate with Native American entities when conducting cultural resource measures.*

Although a Heritage Resources Management Plan (HRMP) is being developed as part of relicensing, it only includes measures to avoid and mitigate impacts to resources within the APE. Assuming that recommended surveys identify additional cultural sites within the planning unit, the Stewardship Council recommends developing a cultural resources management plan for the area not included in the FERC license required HRMP 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. Other means include conservation easements, management agreements, and public interpretation and education programs. Recreation, vandalism, and erosion within this planning unit have the potential to impact cultural sites; the recommended cultural resources management plan would seek to minimize this impact in the future. Development of the cultural resources management plan should be consistent with the existing FERC license required HRMP and should be coordinated with local Native American entities.

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 and through management of areas bordering on the Mokelumne Wilderness to complement adjacent wilderness values.

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.*

Although some timber resources are present on the lands surrounding Blue Lakes, current management has been limited to fuels management and salvage timber management. Due to potential conflicts with existing recreation activities and delicate high elevation habitat, sustainable forestry is only recommended to enhance habitat and provide fuels 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 integrated watershed management, supporting the enhancement of other BPVs over the long term. The forest management plan would be compatible with both current and recommended recreation uses, as well as areas of biological and cultural importance. The forest management plan should be completed in conjunction with the fuels, noxious weed, and wildlife and habitat management plans. As the Blue Lakes area is currently managed under the Salvage prescription by PG&E, snags and downed woody debris would be maintained in the planning unit

where not deemed a safety, fire, or disease hazard as these are important components for wildlife habitat and forest regeneration.

Potential Measure:

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

Management of fuels is very important in reducing fire risk in this planning unit. Therefore, the Stewardship Council recommends developing a fuels management plan for this planning unit. The fuels management plan would ensure long-term forest health and reduce fuel loading and fire hazard throughout the planning unit. Coordination with adjacent landowners and USFS management would promote an integrated approach to the forest, habitat, and recreation resources in this area. This plan should be completed in conjunction with the noxious weed, forest management, and wildlife and habitat management plans.

Agricultural Uses

None recommended.